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An Episode on A Desert Island

By The Author of "Miss Molly"

AN EPISODE

ON A

DESERT ISLAND

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

'MISS MOLLY'

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET
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TO CECIL

CROFT,
LEYBOURNE, 15*th July*.

I AM writing to you to-night because, for many months now, after any episode, or crisis of thought or emotion, I have grown accustomed to turn to you for its comprehension, or its translation, and it is difficult to abandon the habit; but the letters, if these scattered thoughts grow into letters, will remain unposted, and if either of us reads them, it will be I myself, in some far off, undefined future.

What is so hard to realise is that there is nothing definable being given up, or taken away from me, nothing that holds a tangible place in my daily life, and yet at this moment it seems emptied of everything.

Writing this letter, the window wide open, to where the moon is riding swiftly through light clouds overhead, and the

scent of mignonette stealing up through the still air towards me, where I sit on the low, wide window-seat in the silent house, I ask myself, what is it that has vanished, that is going to make any great difference to the everyday routine of life?

A month ago, for instance, there was just as little hope of seeing you. You might have come to the Rectory for some Saturday to Monday, you might have sat through the morning service and walked home with us afterwards, or you might have appeared for tea; but in any case it would have given me very little. I know it, I know it! But you would have been there at the back of every thought and hope, and however little you said—*I knew.* It did not need words—*I knew.*

Even if I never said anything to you, beyond the dullest commonplaces, and your silence invited nothing more, the words passed through some crucible that touched their dull prose with a golden radiance, which had nothing to do with their meaning.

I was aware of it, if you were not. I cannot explain. Words, which crowd so easily to my lips, do not help me here; even when I write, which gives one a chance of thinking and analysing, and getting at something more exact, it is impossible to express that sense of *nearness*, which nothing you ever said or did had brought about, and yet of which I was always conscious.

Now, when I lean over the window-bar, like the Blessed Damozel, and look down to where the black shadows lie thickly about the tall white lilies, and enter into that curious living peace which the cold moonlight and the warm faint scent of mignonette brings to me, I am conscious alike of the feeling and of the inability to express it; it is the oneness of all holy things—for so much you stood in my life.

And it is that which is being taken away.—You have said nothing, done nothing that any one could blame or criticise. You are poor, you have often told me so, and have discussed with me the question of what you will, or can

do;—and so am I, in the helpless way that English women are poor, in large, comfortable houses, with every luxury, and nothing expected from them except the making of that suitable marriage, for which their whole bringing-up is the preparation.

Men may lightly discuss, or hotly argue about a woman's place in creation; but in the present day, if you took the census of opinion of every father and brother, you would discover that the only profession on which they all really smile, is matrimony. It certainly is the only one for which we are trained.

I have fought against it for a long time. I am twenty-eight years old. Every one is disappointed or angry, according as to how they view the subject, and now they have once again found a man whom they consider a suitable husband for a difficult woman.

I liked him when we first met, and I like so few men, except with that surface liking which really raises no hopes. He seemed to me to have some individuality and much strength, a combination miss-

ing in most modern men, and this approval I now recognise was sufficient for my brother's purpose.

But the next stage was unbearable—John Elton and a drawing-room are not compatible, and when I discovered how much farther it was hoped I would go, on the strength of those early smiles and that priggish recognition of his obvious merits, I returned home at once, leaving my brother and his wife to apologise for my flight as best they could.

At any rate, I thought, I shall be free of that nightmare. But our—or my—knowledge of man is limited.

As quick as an express train could bring him, John Elton was knocking at our ancestral halls—with a letter of introduction from Cyril to my father!

His own infatuated action one can understand perhaps.

No one likes to be beaten without playing every possible card. No one doubts the effect of his own eloquence and persuasiveness—if he only gets a chance of using them.

But my brother, who has known me

for twenty-eight years—my tastes, my wishes, and character—that he should have lent his hand to such a losing game is really very extraordinary.

We certainly have no key to men's motives or thoughts,—though we are never left in doubt as to their wishes.

He wrote to me too, recommending his protégé, recapitulating his qualities, a little slurring his charms, but dwelling at great length on his wealth, and all that his money could give me.

Do you think that some one else's money *ever*, in any relation of life, can give one what one wants—unless it gives also the *man* one wants?

It would be no use asking Cyril this question, because he would say: 'My dear Louise, I don't understand what you mean. What can money *not* buy? Of course *you* would not care for the same things that I crave for—I understand that well enough. Where I want a hundred a year to put Bob to school, and don't know where to turn for it, you would be hankering after Venetian lace, or a first edition of some author, whose

rotten poetry you can read from a library.' This is what Cyril calls his power of seeing the other side, but his vision, you will admit, is not spectacled.

His own difficulties are to me far more appalling than my own. Six children, a delicate wife, and small means, would prove to me unsurmountable anxiety; but he is always cheerful and hopeful, and has spent most of his life, not in looking to his own advancement; but planning golden chances for his five sisters.

With all of them he has succeeded, except with me.

Yes, they are all four married, and for a long time it was from them I had most to fear. Not only have women a keener eagerness to marry every other woman than a man, but a sister has a sense of duty, and a dislike of failure thrown in, and for ten years they all spent what leisure they could spare from their own duties and pleasures in trying to marry me to some one, for whom I, or he—or possibly neither of us—had the least fancy.

It certainly behoved one to walk warily.

And with all my experience and care it annoyed me greatly to fall into this trap, or rather not foresee it, in time enough to prevent the unpleasant *dénouement*. For it was a very unpleasant shock to find my father awaiting me with a smile of satisfaction, and Cyril's idiotic introductory letter in his hand, and the not-quite-at-his-ease information that Mr. Elton was in the drawing-room, and that any friend of Cyril's he was always glad to see, etc.

When the actual moment comes there 's always enough strength for a fight, and one generally knows what to do, however much one may have feared beforehand.

As I opened the drawing-room, I felt as if I could cope with twenty John Eltons.

He had on his favourite, largest checked suit, that was the first thing I saw as he tumbled out of the armchair, (he is not graceful in his movements), in which he was sprawling, reading *Comic*

Cuts, which it was a comfort to me to know he must have brought with him. His feet were stretched out so far in front of him on to a footstool, that with the shock of my unexpected entrance, and his eagerness to be friendly, he very nearly fell flat on the floor—our floors are rather slippery in their uncarpeted summer garb to the inexperienced.

When he did get on to his feet, he tottered once or twice before quite regaining his balance, and then he immediately said what he did not mean to, I know.

'It 's rippin' having no carpet, but it 's beastly dangerous.'

To this no answer seemed necessary, so I sat down and talked of the weather, and he stared at me solemnly, whether trying to think of a new topic, or astonished at my brilliancy, I am not sure.

He is very tall, though as he is quite undrilled, it is not his tallness, but his bigness, which strikes one.

His hands and feet are enormous; but they are rather nice hands, very brown and big-jointed, they look capable of

anything. Why, oh why, did his father make such a lot of money, and all his brothers and most of his sisters die young, so that he can't help having it, when Nature so clearly meant him to work tremendously, and never know a day's rest, except the legitimate Sabbath? I can't think why these miscalculations occur!

I know why Cyril likes him. When he is sick of household worries, and poor Harriet's headaches and tears, and slow recoveries, and all the worries with which his domestic hearth is embittered, comes in John Elton, large, and strong, and good-tempered; why should he be otherwise, without a care in the world, or a day's ill-health to ruffle him, or one single thing in his head that is not the gift of original Nature, for I suppose that except for the account of a race in the *Field*, or the jokes in *Comic Cuts*, he has never read anything in his life—and off they go, and on that meeting-place of primeval man, his pleasures and pains, they can talk, or be silent, while walking or riding, till all they are fit for on their

return is a good dinner, a smoke, and bed.

I can see and understand all that, but where do *I* come in? Where, I mean, does Cyril foresee a place for me?

I was thinking of all this as I talked, and he stared, and I honestly tried to sum it up as much in his favour as possible; for there are moments when one feels that the decisive hour *must* come!

When father looks a little harassed, or even as to-day, a little hopeful and satisfied, I feel as if I should like to be able to say: 'I have done it at last—you need not worry about me any more.'

For he is good. It is not he who ruthlessly urges decisions and acceptances on me, as my sisters do, for instance. But it is almost as bad when he says: 'Don't forget, Louise, you are old enough to understand what it means, that I cannot leave you more than a couple of hundred a year, about the same as your dress allowance — and you won't like living with any of your sisters. I am sure Cyril will require every penny there is

to keep up the place. As to the younger boys, God help them, they'll have to fend for themselves.'

I listen, and wish I could ease his mind, just as a return for his not worrying me all these ten years—but I feel that it is all wrong—and it never seems to occur to any of them to retrench a little, so as to secure me another hundred a year. Everything seems as unchangeable as the foundations of the hills. I am glad sometimes that my mother died so long ago, for what should I have done if she had been as pertinacious as my sisters—and always here! Perhaps she might have been different, might have stood between me and all these well-meant attempts. I remember you told me once that there were other kinds of mothers.

The weather discussion had come to an end, the tea had arrived, but my father had not followed its advent as was his custom, and I felt all that that absence portended, and as soon as I politely could, I suggested we should go out. Walking about gardens and stables

seemed so much more in keeping with my visitor, than tea-tables and drawing-rooms.

He was also visibly relieved; very cautiously he followed me to the open window, jumping from rug to rug, like a cat on stepping-stones. I am sure we both felt happier under the free air of heaven.

His shyness wore off at once, I guess it had been shyness that had silenced him, for he immediately began to talk, and almost before he had crossed the lawn, I knew that he felt once more quite at his ease.

'What made you run off like that,' he asked—and by the playfulness of his tones, I realised at once that my departure had been taken as ill-timed coyness.

The moment had arrived—there was no evading it. If I only could! I remember the thought flying through my mind as I looked up at him.

He was leaning towards me; something, the something of real dignity that earnestness always lends, was in his face

—his eyes, small and dark, held real truth and kindness as they looked down into mine.

And then suddenly between us *you* stood. I did not call up your shadow, but it came, and it was your grey black-lashed eyes that were looking into mine, full of that rest and tenderness for which I had learned to turn to them.

You remember that evening?—I am sure you have not forgotten it yet.—When my father sent me word that you were with him, and were staying to dinner—I was only happy, happy with the thought of how seldom Fate does us a good turn, and that capricious and womanly as she is, as a rule, to-day she had tried to blend a man's sense of justice with her usual feminine carelessness.

Yes, I certainly had deserved this, for all I had gone through in the afternoon. It had not even been easy to tell my father that his visitor had departed as abruptly as he had arrived, and to explain why.

He was disappointed, I saw, and I, who cannot bear the atmosphere of dis-

approval, felt inclined to say—'To please *you*, I will try.' Just as I should have eagerly done about most things, any day during these ten years.

Only just this one thing I *cannot*, and as I twisted up my hair, and put on a white muslin gown, I kept repeating—'I deserved this, I did indeed,' pushing away the hideous thought which insidiously protruded itself. 'If you had said "Yes," what would you have felt now?'

It was almost a surprise to find you just the same, standing in the dusk of the summer twilight, a book in your hand, looking out over the garden. But you were not reading, you were looking at the tall white lilies, that I can lift my eyes and see from where I sit, only in the dusk, seen in the silence of evening they were large and dimly white, with the scarcely visible flush of roses between them, a cathedral solemnity over everything, and the scents of day rising as incense from all around; now they are frozen into magic silver and black, under a summer moon.

But you knew when I came in, and

turned your head with some expression in your eyes, which I could not interpret.

Afterwards I learned that my father had told you of the hopes and disappointments that had been crowded into that one brief afternoon.

I wish I had known then. In my recklessness and unhappiness I think I should also have talked to you too about it! We are a very garrulous family,—and your silence frightens and perplexes me often! But supposing I had, what help could you have offered? You could only have said, 'Well done!'—and I know that already—I mean from *our* point of view; though it would not have convinced me, I fear, that our point of view is the right one.

Surely if you have to live in a certain world, it is better to conform to its rules. Otherwise one is only suffering a great deal more than one need.

I don't remember saying anything, which is very odd, and quite unlike me, but I was tired out with worry, and so happy to see you, that no comment seemed necessary or suitable, and as far

as I can remember I just stood beside you, looking out into the placid twilight, with that sense of peace and refreshment that you give me, so that I even forgot to ask whence, or why you had come!

It was at dinner you told us you were going away for a year or two—casually and vaguely. After all, to any one but me it was not a matter of great moment, I suppose,—and to you, who were glad to have found a chance which might lead to work you cared for.

You had already told my father about it, an exchange of confidence for that with which he had burdened you—and you talked about it at dinner, because it was a subject that was better than those that my father chose. He was still a little querulous, and not inclined to take cheerful views of life.

When you told him before dinner of the offer from a good paper to go out to the Colonies, and write popular articles on all the dull things one ought to know about them, you said you had hesitated, not feeling sure if you would care for a year's banishment, but that you were

coming round to think it might be best; my father had backed you up in the idea, and had added that perhaps in every way it would be a good thing, as men friends were not very advantageous for girls!

We are such a garrulous family that we cannot even keep to ourselves the things we don't want any one to know we have said. Next day my father told me that.

It is rather cruel, isn't it, to have that left to think of, and not one word said to me? Why didn't you say something to me? There are moments when I think it most unjust, as well as most cruel.

Why should not I have a word in the affair?

Better, far better, all our useless talk, than that terrible unapproachable silence.

Why should *you* settle which way it was to be?

I would rather have spoken, and said all that was breaking my heart, and have never seen you again, than have lived through those dreary desolate moments, with nothing *of my own* to remember afterwards.

Do you remember following me into

the drawing-room, and asking me to play? The room was dimly lit, and I played by heart. I meant you to understand something—did you? Can you, with your years of self-control and discipline, understand the passionate despair of my ungoverned soul? Or did you understand, and not care—except to escape it?

I shall never know.

You did not hide anything, I feel sure. Not intentionally I mean, as I was trying to do;—you only were silent, and silence is a terrible bridge to such as I. I could not even have attempted to stumble across it. Silence was, I am sure, the Angel's sword, and would bar the entrance to any Paradise.

Even I was helpless and dumb, when it was lifted before my face!

I played. I could not sing, because tears were in my voice, even if my eyes were not wet.

But you guessed something was wrong, I fancy, or I like to think so, for presently you came and stood beside me, so close that I felt your calm overshadow and pacify my storm. Was it the sense

of nearness, or a message from your soul to my troubled heart—and when I ceased playing you said, 'Now I will say Good-night—Good-bye—I have decided to go. In every way it will be best.'

I knew it was not fair, I still think so, —but I was overawed, and could not rebel—besides you gave me no option, no chance of saying what *I* thought or wished.

I think your voice was not quite steady when you said 'Good-bye,'—your eyes are always calm, they told me nothing— —but your voice was very tender and kind—and why not? We have been friends, dear friends, for over a year.

'Good-bye.' The word had dropped into the stillness of the empty room, and you had turned away and reached the door, before I realised this was the end.

It was I who stopped you. Do you remember how I clasped your hands, and clung for a detaining moment?

No, you cannot have forgotten, and I shall always remember, because you were very kind, kind as you would probably have been to a tiresome, persistent child.

You bent your head and kissed my forehead where the hair waves, and with that freed yourself, and I was alone. I did not cry that night. I thanked God for some assurance which had reached my heart, and which I felt, armed me better to meet the future. It was a treasure, and my own, though I could not claim it, and though it would never serve me for any good in this world, yet it would be a touchstone, by which to help out riddles, and answer doubtful questions.

That first night with all my soul swaying towards your memory, the fact remains that I did not fear the renunciation—the complex, analysing nineteenth-century spirit had crept in, and possessed me, and, with paradoxical earnestness I could only be thankful that no worldly trials should test this love; that it would for ever remain something ideal, unspoilt by any touch of earth, unwithered by the hand of time.

At that moment it seemed to me that it had passed with the glory of Elijah's translation straight into heaven, knowing nothing of death.

CROFT,
LEYBOURNE, *Christmas Eve.*

MONTHS have passed since I wrote that last letter, and in the course of months everything and every one changes, especially such a chameleon-like woman as I.

The glow faded, which in its far off unapproachable beauty did comfort me, the hill-tops took cold grey tones, the fiery lights vanished from the sky, and shivering and cold I returned slowly from the heights to the dull valleys, where one has to live; and to the place where one is destined to live, one soon begins to grow acclimatised, and, not only that, but to be interested in, and eager to get the best out of!

I was never a rebel. In great things or small, I should always acquiesce, if the matter were indeed beyond my power of altering;—should instead begin to try and win from Fate the best of the choice remaining.

Other bolder natures would question

the laws and the government that had ordained the *impasse*, and, with a revolution, would probably upset existing things, and render the future easier for others, if not for themselves, but I have nothing of the reactionary about me. I am a law-abiding citizen in that country under whose laws I have grown up.

I question them *often*—but I suffer them,—and for such weakness there is no help.

For a long time I lived entirely in one of the water-tight compartments into which my ship is divided. It is a good idea, rather confining and gloomy to begin with, but one soon grows accustomed, and it 's as well to save what one can;—a leak is better than a wreck! And of late you have vanished further and further away, though John Elton has not come in your place!

Not that I have been left in peace on that subject.

Cyril, of course, was much annoyed; that I was prepared for. He took a week's holiday from Harriet on the strength of it, and came to us, and

talked night and day on the subject, both to my father and me.

My father (rather hypercritically I think), sympathised with him, though I know he did not in the least agree, but peace was worth purchasing at such a price, so I pretended not to notice his duplicity.

In a final burst of fury he went on to my sister, Lady Ravelston, whose sympathy he believed he could count on.

But in this case he was not quite as successful as he had expected.

Janetta did not know Mr. Elton, and she was running a favourite of her own, an elderly Lord Ingham, a somewhat irritable old General, who was looking for a wife, so he frankly told his friends, Janetta amongst others.

The result was that she would not listen to Cyril, nor he to her. This often happens in our family circle, and it would not have astonished or upset me, as they would probably have both talked till they were tired, and then the subject would have dropped; but what did happen was, that they both got rather

heated, and then returned together to attack me.

One at a time I can deal with,—and Cyril I don't heed much,—but this union of forces for divers ends, with embarrassingly straight questions and observations, was most disconcerting. Janetta's General I had only heard of—certainly what I had heard was not very attractive, still as it seemed likely that if, as I had half promised to do, I went to Heath Side for the New Year, I should find John Elton awaiting me, I felt inclined to jump at Janetta's command that I should go to her, and risk the unknown.

When my half-hearted decision was declared, and even my father seemed to think one or other invitation ought to be accepted, Janetta was radiant, and Cyril somewhat sulkily prepared to return home.

'If you prefer an ill-tempered old General——'

'My dear Cyril,' Janetta said sweetly, 'Lord Ingham is a gentleman.'

This was too much for Cyril. 'A

gentleman,' he began hotly, 'consists——'

What ungrammatical thing a gentleman consists of, we were spared knowing, by my interrupting——

'I have told you, Cyril, that I will not go to your house as long as you say that you will welcome Mr. Elton there during my visit. It would be very uncomfortable, to put it mildly, and I am sure he would dislike it even more than I do. Do not let me interfere with your New Year's party, I will go to Ravelston.'

And so it was settled, and the irritation subsided. Apparently they were both under the impression that I had promised them my company at the New Year.

I laughed over the episode when they had departed, and could not help feeling I had rather easily escaped, and then I came up here, and over the fire took out that letter I wrote five months ago, and was amazed to find how far away I had got from it.

You see *no one* shares with you the holiest things in life, they are not the

things that every one else is trying to provide for me!

You have gone thousands of miles, material miles, away, I don't know where you are, never shall know probably. You meant that farewell to be final—and I understood you,—and space and time have taken you far, far away—but there are more dividing things than space and time—and I have meanwhile employed them.

I have passed beyond the reach even of the atmosphere in which you lived, and I am looking forward to the week at Ravelston, even with Lord Ingham thrown in!

My other sisters are in various parts of the world, wives of Admirals, and Governors, and Generals—but Janetta, who is the eldest, and who managed all our love affairs for us, began by marrying herself to the widowed Earl of Ravelston.

He had redeeming points himself, but they were neutralised, or so I have always thought, by the ready-made family with which he presented her.

Janetta is a brave woman; no one, I

fancy, has ever quite realised all that Ravelston hides, but I am sure on those high festivals when all her family meet under its roof-tree, that even her indomitable spirit is glad of my feeble support. She always is most pressing for me to visit her at such times. Ravelston is within a drive, and I have known her come over and fetch me.

My music, she says, is such a help!

You admired her, I remember your once telling me. She certainly is a very handsome woman, but she misses something, doesn't she?

I often find myself wondering exactly what it is. But whatever she has, or has not, I always obey her, not only because she is ten years older than I am, but because she is one of the women whom most people do obey.

Even Lord Ravelston has lost some of the vigour of his outline, since he became Janetta's husband. Knowing all this, don't you respect me a great deal more, that I have withstood the various assaults to which I have been subjected, for ten years?

Of course, I am thankful to say the first six were taken up marrying herself and my other sisters; Cyril slipped away and found his fragile, penniless Harriet when she was not looking.

RAVELSTON.

A FORTNIGHT ago I put this letter away. Something stopped me, something that told me every word was taking me farther and farther away from the place where we parted, and though it is over, and I never look back, yet I do not want to desecrate the spot, which is holy ground.

I want it to be a sanctuary to which I can return, if I will, and I know that if one does not keep the path clear, even to a sanctuary, weeds close over it, and the possibility of return may be lost—I know all that, but I often neglect what is necessary.

And I don't really want to remember —I don't want to burden my life with useless pain.

It is a wise and philosophic decision, and one cannot escape remembrance if one is always looking back, or even forward.

The hour should suffice, and yet sometimes there steals into my heart the

memory of something a man once said to me—a word of warning he gave me in answer to something I had asked. 'We crave for freedom and insist upon it, and then find ourselves in a boundless arid desert, free indeed, but with nothing to console us for what we have lost. There is only one thing sadder than a slave, and that is a slave who has lost his master.'

The warning note is in the air as I write. I cannot think *why* I am writing!

You do not haunt me now. Six months ago you were close beside me always. I did not acknowledge it then, even to myself; now I do. For months you were with every conscious thought. You were the bar to which I brought every action, every word—it was your approval that sanctified every act. To-day, you only come when I beckon; there's nothing to fear in silence or in darkness.

I have to open windows, draw up curtains, unbar shutters, before I can look towards the place where you are.

A great deal of time and trouble is involved. What makes me do it to-night?

It was Janetta who suggested to father the inadvisability of men friends for unmarried women.

I guessed it before, but to-night I proved it. She almost admitted it; it was easy to fit in the missing words.

As I have told you before, we can't even be silent where it is to our advantage. Indeed, I think she is rather proud of the diplomacy involved. I don't feel angry with her—why should I?

She would not have driven you away —*if you had not wished to go*—I know that. It is not consoling, but I never spare myself any facts I can dig up when I am in a fact-grubbing mood.

I want to know the *reason* for things, and I forget, while forcing the reasons to the surface, that very often it is the *unreal* things that have brought about the situation.

You know that, but when you told me, I did not believe you; now occasionally I have a glimmer of your meaning —and regret that, like you, I cannot leave things alone.

Perhaps I shall, when I am old and

grey-headed, and it does not matter what I do! I shall not be a handsome relic like Janetta. Indeed, when I looked at her to-night I was filled with amazement that after ten years of the Leslie family, she should be able to look as she does.

The only person here who is really perfectly happy is Geoffrey. His family, eight children (and Janetta has four), are all odious. I don't think any one could think otherwise, except their mother's sister, a feeble, washed-out, elderly spinster, whom they all unite in ill-treating.

The girls are Minxes, and the boys—there's no uncompound word that could describe the boys.

To Janetta's portion falls the task of providing for the future of the whole eight—her own four treading hard on their heels!

And they are most thoughtlessly arranged: five boys first, and then the three Minxy girls—who will only be a step ahead of her own daughters.

There certainly was not another woman in England, as far as I know, capable of

coping with such a situation, but Janetta does not falter, and what is so extraordinary, has time and inclination, in such desperate circumstances, to look round and keep an eye on me. I ought to be grateful, I am sure.

As I have no responsibility in the matter, I rather like staying at Ravelston.

My brother-in-law is always kind and good-tempered. He can't think of anything to say to me, but I possess the great merit of its not being necessary to try and think of anything!

He always tells me I am well-dressed, and that he finds I get younger and handsomer every time he sees me—and that it's a marvel to him how Janetta manages to keep such a caravanserai in order, and then he settles down to his dinner, feeling that the customary libation has been offered to the tutelary deities. And I am free to try and amuse myself.

On my other side to-night was a fine-looking old soldier. The only thing I ever begged of Janetta's mercy was not

to put one of the boys near me, and two —a tall, wan prig from Oxford and a red-faced Eton boy—were present. Lord Ingham, I rejoice to say, by reason of the loftiness of his position, was relegated to a seat by my sister, far off from me. I could, of course, see him and recognise his charms.

They were not evident from where I sat; he is small and thin, with reddish-grey hair and very red eyebrows; I can easily believe in the irritability of which Janetta has dropped hints.

Every now and then, though the table was very long, and we were a large party, I knew that Janetta was lightly but firmly leading up to my good qualities and general suitability. She never turned an eyelash in my direction, but she was doing it.

'General,' my brother-in-law suddenly shouted, and every one paused aghast. 'How 's the sauce to-night? All right, I expect—lots of brandy in it; I saw the cook myself.'—'No end of a flare-up last night,' he ended confidentially to me, while his guest looked somewhat crossly

round, 'about the sauce for the plum-pudding.

'None of your nursery puddings for him'—and then I think he caught a glance from his wife's lovely brown eyes, which had a checking influence on his exuberant speech.

'He looks rather fractious,' I murmured, out of determination that he should have some reward for his temerity, inopportune as it had been.

'You bet,' he replied; and then hurriedly began a conversation on hunting with the lady on his left, leaving me to wonder whether, in these domestic cabals, it is best to take the man into your confidence, or leave it to chance.

Of course, the example we have just survived, comes of leaving it to chance.

'If your eyes had been brown,' Cyril has often said to me, 'you would have been just as good-looking as Janetta.'

But I am thankful they are not. I *prefer* my grey eyes and brown hair. They are far more ordinary, I know; but when Janetta opens wide those great brown eyes with their thick, black lashes,

and looks at one in that contemptuous way which makes beauty, her rich beauty, the standard of life—and what it can buy, the standard of success, I feel discouraged and dismayed. That was the expression that she turned on me after dinner, when, after a few dutiful words to all her guests, she became aware of the fact that Lord Ingham, whom she had introduced in the most helpful way—we found ourselves talking for five minutes of what she had started us with—was playing at Bezique with the eldest of the Minxes, almost as prim and pale as the Oxford prig, whilst I was seated in a secluded corner, with Colonel Hope, my neighbour of the dinner-table.

He was not young or handsome, he was a very ordinary, middle-aged British soldier, but there was something nice and simple about him, and besides, at dinner he had begun a story, and had promised to finish it afterwards.

I really could not beg Lord Ingham to stay, especially as he told me Bezique suited him better than conversation after dinner.

'You were in Japan,' I prompted, 'when I was wrenched away.'

'Yes,' seating himself, and acting up to my prompting, 'it was during their war that I was in Tokio at the time that the troops were going to China, and a friend took me to see the start. The little Japanese wives and sweethearts, very staid and decorous, were hurrying along the streets by the marching regiments, and I saw that each one was giving to her own man a spray of flowering cherry.

'I asked my friend if the gift meant anything.

'"Yes," he replied, "given under such circumstances it means 'Do not return unless with honour.'" Well, this spring I was in London, and saw the English troops starting, the same things happening, the women running alongside and calling their farewells, most of them taking the form of "Whatever 'appens, Bill, come back." It was all heartfelt, the real thing, tears and excitement, and reckless sorrow, giving facility of expression, and carelessness of onlookers—one

outstretched hand offering, the other receiving, a bottle of gin, as a suitable parting present. Civilisation and barbarism, you see, are very far apart.'

He had finished his little story. 'Which ranks highest,' he asked, 'do you think?

'What have we gained in exchange for all that civilisation has taken away?'

'It has taken away most things worth having,' I replied rather hotly, and it was then I looked up and saw Janetta's eyes.

Civilisation *Rampant*! I really was quite agitated, and found myself standing up, even before she had asked me to play—and I went to the piano feeling conscience-stricken.

But Colonel Hope's question followed me; through the plaintive notes it kept obtruding, just the sorrowful fact of the price we all must pay for what has been rescued from barbarism, and forced upon our acceptance, whether we care for it or not.

'Do sing,' some one presently begged —and Reggie, who, besides being a prig, is in love and rather sentimental, seconded

the request. A kind lady, the governess of the Minxes, played my accompaniments —and in that mood, with all those crowding thoughts which I had ceased to beckon nearer, and which were not very far off, I sang well. My voice is a rich, unhappy contralto.

My brother-in-law, who was sneaking off to his pipe, stopped in the doorway, fidgeting in a manner that made me nervous. He likes music in his own odd way, but it must be 'a tune' as he describes it. And I generally suit my choice to his tastes, but to-night I could not. I felt as if my own voice lifted me up and away from all these people, who did not know, or care, or understand. Something, some one, was calling me to a happier place, where life and its needs were simpler—purer—holier.

I was astonished to find tears in my eyes when I had done, I, who never cry. Geoffrey, a little disappointed, I saw edging himself out of the room. He would have tried to go unnoticed, but Lord Ingham was following him, cards in hand—Minx after him.

She paused, in answer to Janetta's question, to tell her they were going to the billiard-room, as they could not count with a piano in the room.

Late at night Janetta came to my room when I was brushing my hair; she was in a relenting mood, I saw; she did not look at me in the awe-inspiring way that terrifies me. Her visit had occurred during a momentary lull in the storm of daily life.

I admire her far more under those circumstances, and she certainly is even yet beautiful, in muslin and lace furbelows, with her dark hair waving below her waist, and that rich red flame of colour in her brown cheeks.

We talked a long time on all sorts of home subjects, but we neither of us mentioned what was nearest, till she had said 'Good-night,' and had her hand on the lock.

And then, 'Janetta,' I said, 'don't you think it is very extravagant of you, with such a schoolroom opening out, to try and find wives beyond your own fireside for the bachelors who turn to you for help?'

She did not look round, but I knew I had planted my first arrow. 'Especially,' I added, 'when they don't like music, and adore Bezique.'

'It's *very disappointing*——' she began, but she did not finish her sentence. She looked back and suddenly laughed heartily, her white teeth showing in the candle-light.

'What an old curmudgeon!' Janetta's redeeming virtue is her sense of humour.

I laughed with her, but my smiles died out directly I was left alone.

I sat down and wrote the end of this letter—that was where my mood had drifted me. The tears came again into my eyes, my heart ached with the passionate despair that I had felt when singing, and to which I refused a name, the despair of loneliness, and of wrong standards, and of all that civilisation has taken away in its barter with a barbarism —which had had its standards, and had kept them!

Crouching down on the hearth-rug by the glowing fire, my unbalanced thoughts went wavering back and forth, until at

length they turned fairly down the long road I had travelled, and I stood once more by your side on that still, long-past summer night.

It was with an effort I brought them home again to Colonel Hope and his story.

Yes, that was safer thinking—and interesting thinking. In similar circumstances, I expect I should say—or think, much like Bill's sweetheart, 'Whatever happens, come back.'

But would it be all right later on, one wonders? Is it not possible that after a time one would find it was not the same man who had come back, if he had left some blossoms of the flowering cherry out yonder, where duty had called him? Would it not be, as it is with all else, that it is the things that are not seen that are eternal?

But to-night it is not ethical questions or philosophic doubts that can comfort me—my brain is still afire, and the flame has kindled all half-buried hopes and desires. For the time being the mood is dominant that recognises how happy

I have been. I did not even know, while the hours were passing, how happy I was. All through those months when I saw you so often, it seemed to me that I was able to give you something that you wanted—something you did not ask for—but that you came and took from my hands when the need was upon you—and in the silence which hedged in the gift and the recipient, there was the holiness of consecration.

I asked nothing else, I was growing in grace, but Fate has never smiled upon my blossoming. All redeeming things have just touched me, shown themselves, and passed me by.

This, the greatest, holiest possibility, just the same as others have done.

The wild rush of words seemed almost audible in the silence of the room. I had to open the window and lean out into the frosty starlight, before my brain was calm enough for sleep.

But later, when I was in bed and had almost crossed the dividing river into the land of dreams, or perhaps had crossed and looked backwards—I was conscious

of a voice, very low and clear, which repeated: 'But it is nevertheless true, that it is the things that are not seen that are eternal.'

I opened my eyes into some restful silence, which felt like the shelter of broad, brooding wings; it was all quite still, but in the stillness and the darkness, your eyes were looking into mine.

YACHT 'MIRANDA,' *9th July.*

I am beginning to think that I was born to be an author, for directly I am moved to any emotion, great or small, my immediate instinct is to seek out paper and ink, and write down all I can remember about it.

To-night, when the instinct increased to a fever, I came here to the saloon, which at this hour is deserted, and looked about for the necessary adjuncts.

I don't think I meant to, but somehow it is still to you I address the result.

Since December, when I locked up the case where the other letters lie, I have not opened it, and now I do not even glance at them.

It is all fading, as I wish it to do, as with such a woman as I, it is sure to do.

Willingly I never turn in the direction of pain and sorrow. Why should I?

My instincts are all sunwards.

Sometimes I think that if there were

only one ray of sunshine left in the world, I should be found basking in it.

The letters to you were begun with a vague idea of carrying my moods, and emotions, and acts to the bar of your judgment; but I no longer wish that.

To-night I only wish to write down, before I forget it, the episode of the Sailing of the *Miranda*, really sufficiently diverting to be immortalised, though there have been moments when I have not perhaps recognised how diverting it was.

There are times when even Janetta needs repose, or at any rate, change of action, so when Jock Leslie, her husband's youngest brother, offered a cruise on his yacht, she agreed to go, even though Geoffrey backed out of it at the last minute.

The invitation included me, and after months of an English spring, followed by a London season, a voyage to San Francisco, and a return from there across America, and home in a steamer from New York, sounded a delightful prospect.

We are all good sailors. We all have unfailing good health. As Janetta feelingly says: 'With such advantages, Louise, you ought not to settle down into that narrow, selfish life that you love.'

Her reasons are always so refreshingly uncommon.

Jock Leslie is as like Geoffrey as two brothers well can be. The only difference I see in them is that if Jock is ever inclined to speak, it is of the sea and ships, whereas Geoffrey would utter dark sayings about race-horses; but considering how few words either of them is capable of, it's difficult to tell them apart.

Once I really believe in the depths of her restless, energetic — heart, I was going to say, but substitute spirit, Janetta had views in the yacht direction for me, but I am thankful to say even her dauntless soul quailed before the impossibilities of the task. She has that truly great quality of recognising impossibilities, so when I had asked, and been assured, that her irritable general was

not going to accompany us, I started in a state of buoyant cheerfulness.

The recognition that music bothered him, and that I should be expected to play Bezique after dinner, had made her realise the uselessness of her tactics.

We started therefore very amicably, and in this mood, with no necessity to set an example to her 'steps,' or keep a lynx eye on Geoffrey, Janetta is delightful.

She always makes a thing go off well; and when one only has to follow her guiding steps, and is not being hounded on in obedience to her commands down an undesirable road, I know no one more charming to follow. Cyril and a couple of men were to meet us at Naples. I did not take the trouble to ask who they were. I was in that radiant state of health and spirits that it really did not matter.

After those weeks in London — for Janetta insisted on my helping her through the season — the excitement of the wind and salt air was intoxicating.

We have a third lady on board,—Lady

Henry Lawrence—and from her constant remarks and questions it was easy to learn that Don Vassal was one of the men in Cyril's charge.

'She's a cat, I am sure,' Janetta informed me after a few days; 'but as there are no girls it doesn't matter what tricks she plays—I don't count *you*, of course. And if men like Geof or Jock choose a woman for this kind of thing, one must expect a catty one. She does not appear amusing. Once Don Vassal arrives, he will look after her, I suppose.'

I ventured to ask if there were a husband. 'Oh, I suppose so,' Janetta answered absently. 'Of course there is. What absurd questions you ask! Lord Henry Lawrence.'

So there we were for the first week.

The only amusement of a social or mental kind was watching the attempts of Lady Henry to make herself agreeable to Jock Leslie.

Then one heavenly afternoon about four o'clock we arrived at Naples.

Sea and sky a sapphire blue, my heart so light that the summer was reflected

in it. It is always at those impossibly perfect moments that the bolt falls.

I was leaning over the side watching the boat nearing us which had gone off to fetch the new passengers, and it was just getting close enough for me to distinguish Cyril's smooth brown head. Idly my eyes travelled on to a neat, slight man in a very smart yachting suit.

Was he the much-talked-of Don Vassal; or — there was a choice, of course. I looked towards him next, idly at first, and then with a quick flush of interest.

Surely that big ungainly form, even in blue serge, was not unfamiliar; surely I knew that head with the quick beady eyes, lifted in evident curiosity. No, there was no possible mistake. It *was* John Elton in the flesh, certainly not out of it.

For a moment I was simply speechless with fury. I rushed across the deck with the vague determination to speak to Jock, to have it out with Cyril, and then to go ashore.

But almost in the same second of time

other reasonings prevailed. What was it to me? It was not *my* house, or yacht. Very likely Jock knew nothing of the affair. If any one was to blame, it was Cyril—Cyril with his amiable eagerness to help every one, not as would be for the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but for the immediate result on the unit of whom he approved. A minute later I was shaking hands with Mr. Elton, a hypocritical smile of welcome accompanying the action, and with a very comfortable recognition of nervous flurry in Cyril's demonstrative hug, and what was of more interest, an expression in Janetta's eyes which I could not mistake. She was an accessory.

It was with her I turned away. And I knew that nothing in creation *could* have staggered her but my silence. She was prepared for anything but that. There 's this certain facility in a quarrel with your own family, you know what to expect.

Five minutes' silence to Janetta in her present emotional state, and she was bound to say something.

I don't think three had elapsed before she began—

'I hope you don't mind Cyril bringing Mr. Elton. He wrote and asked Jock, and there seemed nothing against it.'

'My dear Janetta, it's no concern of mine what visitors Jock asks on to his yacht surely. One takes the risk when one accepts the invitation, as in the case of Lady Henry.'

'I was afraid you might not like it.'

'If I had been consulted, I should have certainly said that from what I have seen of him, I don't think that he will prove a suitable element; but as I was not, I can only repeat, it does not matter. He is not *my* visitor—it's Cyril's affair—and yours, I suppose.'

Janetta never lies. Why should she? She is without any excuse to be untruthful.

A man bigger and stronger than his fellows, with a fist of iron, and an unconquered reputation with the sword, is not likely to tell lies. He can go swaggering through life, can afford to disdain anything in the shape even of diplomacy.

It behoves others to keep out of his way, it does not fall to his lot to smooth the path for them.

'To tell you the truth, Louise,' was Janetta's temperate reply, 'he looks far worse than Cyril had led me to expect.'

This showed me, of course, that there had been negotiations, from which I had been excluded, and instead of feeling angry, as I ought to have done, I was sincerely amused.

John Elton might have much in common with primeval man, there *might* be something in him—there was, till he came too near,—that might interest me, or perhaps my curiosity,—but there's absolutely nothing in him that Janetta could endure for ten minutes.

My revenge was looming. Janetta's duty it would certainly be, to look after the guest, that she had asked for.

'Well, it has nothing to do with me,' I repeated. 'He is not my guest, I am thankful to say.'

There was a certain unaccustomed note of uncertainty, almost a falter in my sister's reply—

'Jock knows that you know him——'

'Jock is not difficult,' I retorted; 'I can easily explain that to him.'

Humility comes with difficulty to arrogant souls. Janetta would like to have asked me to abstain from taking Jock into my confidence (which I certainly had no intention of doing), but she could not bring herself to do it. The situation was too novel.

She had expected something quite different. Anger and words on my part, which would have given her the starting-off point she needed.

I had really managed very cleverly—placed her in the wrong, and in the awkward position of having to explain.

This annoyed her, not with herself, but with Cyril in a minor degree, and Mr. Elton in a major.

To Cyril I have no doubt she expressed in the clearest language, and with all the family volubility, what she thought; to Mr. Elton she was frigidly polite.

But he, I am sure, was quite unconscious of her annoyance, and was enjoying

himself enormously. Cyril was huffy for an hour or two, but his sunny temper bounds up again directly after any shock, and by the first evening he had apparently sent Harriet and the six children out of sight and memory, and was thoroughly happy, in that disgraceful fashion which is a family habit, more or less, and which in him and me has almost reached a disease.

And he, like Janetta, is a boon to any small party; his unfailing good temper and readiness to act on every suggestion, and in addition no one is ever jealous of either of us. Is that a compliment? Or is it merely because we take life so lightly, that we don't agitate the earnest, and the others don't count?

Our host seems delighted with Mr. Elton. They spent hours together exploring and talking over every spar and line of the *Miranda*. So the snub to Cyril, which I had half expected, did not come.

Jock is unworldly in every way; he and his brother are alike in that. I never heard either of them judge any one ex-

cept on their merits,—not their social merits—but on the self that lies deeper down than that.

They don't know it, they are bookless, unanalytical men, both of them, but I don't think they ever make fundamental mistakes about men, whatever they may do about women—and no one can deny that John Elton is manly and strong,—did I not like him for those qualities myself at first?

And for the first twenty-four hours he was very harmless—not quite happy unless he was in the engine-room, or some other equally important spot; but after that first day I saw all that beginning to wear off. I knew the symptoms of 'making himself at home,' as he himself would have described it.

And Janetta connived at it, though I believe unintentionally.

She was now thoroughly in her element, providing amusements, arranging all sorts of games. She is one of those indefatigable women who cannot bear to see others at peace, doing nothing.

And as is customary when one invites

a strong spirit into any *milieu*, every one else is glad to do what is suggested.

They immediately want to play games also—or think they do!

A set of feeble-minded, well-intentioned people, was just what she delights in; she is wasted on a family, even such a one as she has adopted,—she could rule a kingdom—or govern an Institution—the ordinary children and husband rule is too trivial for such powers of administration and control. In a few days John Elton will be owning her sway, though at present she is anxious in a perfectly polite and smart manner to let him feel that he is Cyril's friend, not hers. When he bows himself before the throne, and shows a just appreciation of its loftiness, she will begin to hold out the sceptre, and it is quite possible, look round amongst her friends or relations for a wife for him—certainly for a yacht!

Cyril has also nervously approached me on the vital question. In a light off-hand manner he said last night, 'I hope you didn't mind my bringing Elton. He

is a splendid sailor, and very keen about yachting.'

'Dear Cyril,' I cut him short, 'his hereness or thereness makes no difference to me. Don't be apologetic pray——'

'Of course,' as I saw he was going to badger me with questions, 'of course it 's quite different meeting him at some one else's house—where I have nothing to do with the invitations, to spending the New Year at my brother's, with whom he is staying—if that is what you are alluding to. I am sure neither he nor I would have liked it.

'Besides, that was all six months ago. Do let us forget it, and enjoy the present moment. I *have* forgotten it—for the matter of that.'

And Cyril, nothing loth, complied.

Everything as you see was going quite smoothly, when Janetta began arranging games. And really when there are no Minxes or governesses looking on to take hints for their own conduct—Janetta is very *risquée.*

I always tremble when she tells me she

has thought of some brilliant scheme, brilliant generally from its novelty.

The first idea was charades, but on that I looked very coldly. To dress up and act with John Elton—for Janetta would, I knew, listen to no remonstrances, if inspired with what she would call *Art* —did not attract me.

She put that idea aside for future consideration, when, as she explained, she should have found out what we could all do.

'Knowing I can sing and play, why not have the piano on deck,' I suggested, 'and Don banjos, and I am sure Lady Henry does also—there you are,' but that scheme was forgotten before evening in a new game which Janetta informed us she had got out of the *Life of Madame de Staël.*

I have my doubts as to its origin—because Janetta rarely reads—she really has no time, I admit—and in addition, the game, as explained by her, did not seem to bear much resemblance to the habits of Madame de Staël, from the very little I know of them.

'You all sit round the table,' she began, 'and write letters to each other.'

'I can't write,' Don Vassal plaintively began.

'Nonsense,' Janetta replied, 'you must try, and if you cannot, it is quite time you learned.'

'It is so dangerous,' Don pleaded, 'every one tells me so. Once you begin, you are always getting into trouble. And who am I to write to?' Janetta merely paused for him to stop grumbling.

'You can write to any of us,' she said kindly, 'and you can say anything you like. And without a post, don't you see what a boon it will be, to get a letter?'

'I think it's a rippin' game,' John Elton observed. He had drawn near, and was listening attentively.

Janetta smiled, frigidly, but approvingly.

'After dinner we'll try it.'

There was no escape, I saw—but I knew evil would come of it. It was in the air, as we all sat down after dinner to the new game.

We could not sit round a table, as

Janetta assured us Madame de Staël and her party did—we had to content ourselves with basket-chairs, and very inadequate indelible pencils.

'I call it "Corinne,"' my sister explained, 'and I mean to patent the idea. For a sea-journey it is a splendid invention, and it keeps one up to the necessity of thinking a little.'

'I shall write to you, Don,' Lady Henry said in her plaintive little voice, 'and I shall pretend you are my husband. I suppose Lady Ravelston, we need not be *ourselves*?'

'I shall write to you,' Don replied impishly, 'but *I* shall pretend I am not.'

Janetta pretended she did not hear. I laughed. Lady Henry went on unmoved with her questions.

'Must we read our letters out aloud afterwards?'

'Certainly not,' my sister explained. 'It's like the post office, they are just given to the person for whom they are intended. That's all. I thought of calling it "The Silent Post Office,"' she added, 'but Corinne is better. It

raises more expectation. Come along, Jock, and begin.

'You had better write to Louise—it will be easier perhaps.'

But with unexpected fervour, Mr. Leslie replied, 'No, I shall not; I am going to write to Lady Henry.'

'Lady Henry will be just like the old G.P.O. itself,' Don observed. 'Never mind Miss Mauvesyn, if I learn to write in time, you shall have a letter from me as well, to make up for any disappointment in *that* direction,' with a wave towards the recalcitrant Jock.

'Who was Corinne?' was his next comment.

'It would take too long to explain,' Janetta replied. From which I gathered, as I suspected, her knowledge of the game had not been obtained first hand.

'I love explanations,' Don insisted, 'and I am very disappointed Lady Ravelston, that the letters are not to be read out. I am quite sure you are wrong about that rule. I should like to see for myself what Madame Thingummy said on the subject.'

'Oh, do be quiet,' my sister said—she was scribbling vehemently—'you put me out.'

'Are you writing to me? For if you are, and you let me say it all out, you could *write* me the answers, you know.'

But Janetta only shook her head.

'Do let us put all the letters in a basket, and draw them,' insisted Don, 'and then read them aloud.'

It was John Elton who interposed, 'No, that was a rotten idea. Letters ought only to be read by those for whom they were meant.'

He stopped in the flow of his composition with poised indelible pencil to make his protest, and I knew when he stared at me just as he did on that memorable July afternoon, that he was writing some horrible rigmarole to me.

It was an odious game! I wished with all the fervour of which I was capable, that I had the strength of mind to stand up, and say I would not play.

'I can't bear to think of no one seeing what I have done,' Don put down his

pencil with this regret; 'it's wasted on one reader.'

Lady Henry lifted pathetic eyes in answer to this. If it had not been for the consciousness of some overhanging disaster, I should have been enjoying myself. I felt in an absurd mood, and I had written all the absurdities to Cyril, who I knew would understand, and appreciate.

He, at any rate, was no one's prey. I *could* have sent them to Don Vassal; he I also knew would have enjoyed them, but there was a "Hands Off" about Lady Henry that I felt bound to respect, even in fun; Jock was almost as difficult to write to as to converse with—and John Elton I felt was best left alone.

My code of morals with respect to him was that it would be undignified to flirt with a man not quite in one's own set. The only excuse for familiarity would be that I meant to marry him.

If I loved him, love would be the excuse, and the bridge—but as it is—the dividing line should be kept strictly drawn.

There seemed every chance of the game being prolonged till midnight; the moon rose, and sent a line of silver across the soft swell of the waves, but we could not spare the time from our ridiculous amusement to look at it. Instead, all our attention was reserved for Jock Leslie, who at ten o'clock was still in the throes of composition, with a ruffled head, and about half a sheet written, as we could all see, and groaning aloud at every fresh effort—while Don Vassal and Cyril suggested suitable, or unsuitable phrases.

'If you would be quiet,' the poor man said, 'I should get along much faster.'

But at last all the eight envelopes were sealed, and addressed, and put in the basket that Janetta held for the purpose.

'I shall have a time-limit to-morrow,' she observed. 'Half an hour is quite long enough to write anything in—I mean anything any one would care to read. And to-morrow we must not discuss beforehand to whom we are going to write. The excitement con-

sists partly in finding out afterwards how many letters each one receives.'

I foresee that Corinne is destined to become an institution.

'Nothing for you, Jock. Of course it would be more amusing if it were played by a larger party. Twenty or thirty people there ought to be—but still—— Two for you, Lady Henry, three—I see——'

In addition to Don's and Jock's scrawl, there was also a fat envelope from Cyril.

I could not help sharing Don's desire that afterwards we might all know what every one had said!

'One for you, Louise.' I withdrew the vague wish as I lifted the expected letter, with its thick, strong, very black address.

'Nothing for me,' my sister concluded tragically, 'but I dare say I shall get an answer to mine to-morrow. It 's to you, Mr. Vassal. In the meantime I shall leave you all to read your letters in peace.'

'In peace,' Don repeated. 'That 's not the way with letters received the

last thing. I expect after reading mine not to sleep a wink all night. Give me courage, Miss Mauvesyn, let us read ours together.'

'Yes,' I assented, unsealing mine, with the one idea uppermost to look unprognostic of any tremor in opening it.

But a minute later I knew that if any one was watching me, they would have been aware of the emotion that shook me, as I glanced at it.

It only needed a glance to take it all in. When I lifted my eyes, and looked hastily around, it was to see that the author of the epistle was gazing at me, I suppose with the wish to note its effect! Certainly a new horror added to the ordinary postman's knock, which I am glad to realise does not usually prevail.

A passionate love-letter, so much I grasped, in that all-sufficing glance.

It takes a genius to write a readable love-letter; this, with its underlinings, and notes of exclamation, and dramatic questions, brought before me, even in that moment of time, the kind of letter one finds in cases for Breach of Promise!

I knew my cheeks were blazing, and probably my eyes, as I walked across the deck, crumpling up the horrid thing in my hand, and having reached the edge I flung it as far as my strength and anger would permit, out into the sea.

It bobbed up and down a few moments, a white ball in the moonshine, and then took its disagreeable self out of sight.

When I turned round, and walked back to the others, John Elton was still, I saw, staring after me, just as when I left. A little perplexity in his unwinking eyes, and also, I fancied,—and this annoyed me more than all the rest—a little admiration.

What a pity to be so impulsive! The whole action, seen in that look of admiration, took on a sort of Surrey-side touch of vulgar melodrama.

YACHT 'MIRANDA,'
15th July.

The situation which I had abstained from studying was clearly outlined by Mr. Elton's letter. I went to bed determining to call in a board of chaperons to admonish him, I woke with the consciousness that my own unaided self would be far more trustworthy than any board!

The consciousness of integrity upheld me, for every one was to blame except me.

First and foremost John Elton himself. It was his bad taste that had brought about the situation. He had known I was on board, and that my desire for his presence, during the previous six months, to say the least of it, had not been overwhelming.

Of course, it was very probable that Cyril had smoothed the way,—all his Irish blood is uppermost on these occasions,—and doubtless Janetta, wishing to help, may have influenced him, but he knew quite enough to have owed it to

me to ask whether *I* endorsed the invitation. Not having done so, only proves more clearly than ever what he is —*au fond.*

More than ever was I thankful that matters were as they were! All things considered, and out in mid-ocean, where, however desirable it might be, he could not be asked to get out and walk, the wisest course seemed to be to bottle up my wrath until a more convenient season, —an operation tantamount with me to running the risk of forgetting all about it.

My sister was not so amenable, and I think that fact rather helped me to justice and virtue, or the imitation of those qualities; to her there was more than the fact of his presence—he was also taking the place of some one who might have amused her.

Jock had wanted another man, he would have welcomed any friend of hers —and there were so many men who would have been more likely to add to the gaiety of nations.

In such a mood there was very little Mr. Elton could do, likely to gain her

approbation,—he was certainly more admired when he was in the engine-room than anywhere else.

I adhered to my original plan—I ignored him—he was no business of mine. This I knew was exasperating to every one, but that did not deter me.

When he capped one of Janetta's most dainty and suggestive stories with one that left *nothing* to the imagination, I was delighted, though it was a history that really would have made me blush for a month, if I had not been chuckling in the twilight, at the evident fact that he was trying to please, and thought that he was following suit.

I knew he was all 'anywhere' when my sister got up and walked away without a comment. Poor thing, he was in a most bewildering *milieu*, where there were *no* laws.

'I 'm blushing,' Don Vassal threw into the silence; 'aren't you, Lady Henry? You really ought to be, you know.—Come back, Lady Ravelston,' as Janetta, red-cheeked and indignant, looked round; 'it 's all right now. It—the tale—is

finished. He 's gone,' with a dramatic wave——

'Where,' questioned Janetta.

'To cool himself in the engine-room. He was as red as you! Poor dear lady, it *did* make you hot! But calm yourself.'

'It's too bad of Cyril!—Where is he?' jumping up. 'He had no business to ask for an invitation for such a——' she hunted wildly after a word for a moment —'such a Bounder,' with startling emphasis.

'He isn't a Bounder, when he isn't bounding.' This was such an accurate and epigrammatic definition, that I looked up gratefully. With all his laziness and impishness, Don Vassal had produced a truer, juster description than would ever have been had from either of us.

'He is impossible,' my sister went on. She was still very angry.

'Well, he doesn't drop his h's——'

'And his manners,' she retorted. 'You can only say he never had any, so of course it 's absurd to expect them,' and

she looked at me as she spoke, as if I was responsible for his bringing up.

You see there were a good many crumpled rose-leaves all over the *Miranda*.

And I am so imitative, or so adaptive, that I was beginning to enjoy it all: the restless sense of insecurity which heralded in every hour made the past year seem dull. I was ready for all Janetta's moods, always more pronounced than my own, but where she outlined, I was now ready to fill in.

Corinne, I am thankful to say, was abandoned. We were not numerous or literary enough for its possibilities or entanglements; the piano was placed on deck, and in the cool of the evening music lent itself to every extravagance.

Janetta, in a short red petticoat, with a ribbon in her dark hair, danced a jig with wild abandon: Cyril, as her partner, was an animating sight. All the Irish blood that was in us came to the surface, and if Janetta was an amazement, Cyril ran her pretty close. With all those

miles of sea between him and Harriet, he was like a schoolboy.

This capacity for gaiety was the link that bound us all to the Leslies. Jock's bursts of delighted laughter were almost as agitating as his hours of dumbness. He adored Janetta, especially in these wild moods, when she was a Joy, and not an Example.

I suppose, deep down, I am like her, though superficially the fact is undiscoverable. Are we really alike, or is it only that she is so strong, and I am so adaptive, that I take on colour from what is about me, and what is more dangerous, after a while, begin to alter in form as well?

I am sure that I should have been the very first monkey who would have been found ambling awkwardly on my hind legs after the first woman I saw, fanning myself with a palm leaf, or with my tail twisted round my neck, as a boa, according to her then mode of dress.

The sad antithesis is that I expect that I should also have been the first to fall

back into barbarism, and re-accept monkey habits, and enjoy them.

Cyril also is 'atmospheric,' hence his belovedness in all the various relations of life. It is a blessing, of course, there are no magic glasses. Harriet is a dear, ailing, stupid thing, and always urging him to amuse himself, but I am not sure whether she would enjoy the fact as much as the idea!

When he isn't dancing jigs, or singing Irish songs in a pathetic baritone, he sits beside Lady Henry, and helps her to knit or crochet, or whatever it is that she does. He is now learning to make a tie. 'It will be such an economy,' he tells us, 'when he can *make* them for half-a-crown, instead of having to pay seven-and-sixpence for them.'

Lady Henry remains rigidly unhumorous. I never met any one so perfectly, awfully, unresponsive to the smallest comprehension of the word.

I think we have all rescinded our first judgments; even Janetta says she isn't as 'catty' as she thought. And she very seldom withdraws; in fact,

she is generally correct in her estimates.

But, as she says, the difficulty with Lady Henry is, that she's in another language! So, in translating, one is liable to make mistakes. Don, I expect, knows the language, but he has a gift of his own, and it *is* languages. He understands more of John Elton's than any one else on board—except Jock, but then he only says to him the words they both know.

Having nothing to divert my own thoughts, I have amused myself discovering all these odds and ends.

Don Vassal often walks and talks with me; while Cyril is learning to knit, he has idle moments,—once, as we leant over the side of the *Miranda* late at night, with a lovely starry sky above, and trails of phosphorus below, he suddenly left these obvious topics, and said quite low, lighting a cigarette meanwhile, 'She's had a hard life,' with a jerk in the direction of a white fluffy tea-gown far down the deck—'a damned hard life.'

Somehow it was difficult to associate Lady Henry with anything so dramatic.

'What's wrong?' I asked sympathetically.

'*He*, as I dare say you know, is gallivanting about the world with some one else.'

I was really surprised. I don't think I had been interested enough hitherto to ask any questions.

'What's he like?' I questioned now, to make up for lost time,—'I never met her before, or heard of her, I think.'

'He,' exclaimed Don fiercely, 'is an objectionable ass. But, whatever he may be—and *she* says he's only silly—he has behaved to her in a beastly way.'

This I quite endorsed. 'She ain't very clever, I dare say, but she's pretty, and quite straight. As straight,' with a vague look into the duskiness around us, 'as that mast.'

I admitted this gave an heroic idea of her straightness, and Don laughed.

It is odd in what unlikely places one comes across Quixotism, even in these

un-Quixotic days. Such a different summing up to the story, to what I should have supposed a fortnight ago.

'And how does she look at it,' I questioned presently.

'She's rather in love with him still, I fancy, though I try to argue her out of it. What's the use? Far better be in love with me,—at any rate, in the meantime——'

'There's something in that——'

'Oh, I dare say she'll come round, but she doesn't like funny men, and she thinks I am funny. It worries her often, she says, trying to guess what I mean. There was *nothing* to guess at in Henry. He always said exactly what he meant, and she understood.'

'Under those circumstances,' I interrupted, 'I think it is pathetic. I mean that he went away, and left any one who was pleased with him!'

'You are quite right. She thinks he is a little silly over this dancing-girl, and that he'll get tired of her and come back——'

'My dear Don'—I could not help it,

the words were drawn out of me—'it's a tragedy.'

'You *are* a good sort, Miss Mauvesyn. I knew it the first moment I set eyes on you. *You* don't think I am funny, do you? It's a *hateful* idea, and I assure you all my time now is taken up trying to talk so that people—women—can understand me. Like Henry Lawrence, you know!'

For a moment, as I stood there in the starlight, Don silently smoking by my side, the clouds lifted, or the fog, whichever it is, that has settled down between me and the old life, and I understood him. *I had the key.* I knew what it was that had lightened the darkness, that whenever I looked back, always hung about the path I had come. It was the light of sincerity and feeling.

No matter how mocking the words, behind them was the fact, and he wanted me to know it. It was so strong and real, that he did not wish me to think it was play,—or worse.

There was a wavering flame in my own heart which almost burnt up under the

inspiration of his,—and then Janetta came over towards us, her eyes in the starlight as brilliant as the diamonds in her ears.

'Come, Don, you must not leave me any longer. It's Louise's turn to entertain Mr. Elton—I am sure I have done my duty.'

'Really to hear her talk,' I could not help ejaculating, 'one would think I had asked him on board.'

'And didn't you?' There was veritable surprise in Don Vassal's voice.

'He is Cyril's guest.' I could not even then help sparing Janetta, though she did not deserve it, and I don't think she would have cared if I had not. 'But Janetta endorsed the invitation, so she ought to share the anxiety, especially as Cyril has never been taught to do anything he does not like.'

'I am still dumb with amazement.—I always understood that you had sifted England for a friend, and brought him. —I am sure Jock told me so, and he said you had made a thundering good selection.'

Now don't you think my family are a little hard on me? It was all I could do not to turn round and announce the whole unvarnished truth. I glanced at Janetta; she was staring at the stars with lovely untroubled eyes. I could see either she was not listening, or pretending not to. It is sometimes very hard to be as polite as one has been brought up to be.

I only repeated: 'You have got hold of a very mistaken idea—but Jock, as I know, is always vague, and therefore misleading.' Then I left him and Janetta to plan new schemes for our diversion, and walked over to where Mr. Elton was evidently awaiting me.

Somehow after that talk with Don, and the indescribable refinement of his slight figure, and the delicate humour and comprehension of his drawling words, the clumsiness of John Elton's bigness, and his 'Ehs?' and 'Whats?' and 'I says,' which so thickly interlarded every obvious stupid thing he had to say, seemed more violently exaggerated than usual.

Since the episode of Corinne I had ignored him as much as was possible, without attracting attention, or drawing forth an explanation, and with such a small party the last had not been difficult. And yet behind it all I really felt a little sorry for him.

He was doing the best he could, he was trying to please—and there was an annoying sensation, whenever I gave it a thought, that it was Cyril and Janetta who were in the wrong.

If you catch a frog and put it in a canary's cage—it is rather vulgar, I feel, to keep on criticising its hops, and looking the other way when it's making the best leap it can, because it can't sing. You knew that when you put it there!

I tried to remember all this as I drew near him, and honestly endeavoured to think of something agreeable to say.

What did we talk of in those first days when we seemed to have a good deal in common? For the moment I could remember nothing except a long and animated discussion on the best way of baking potatoes. It would really be

impossible to begin with such a topic a year later.

These ridiculous thoughts flitted through my mind, and then he turned round and saved me any trouble of inventing a topic.

'Look here, Miss Mauvesyn.' He always began his sentences with 'Look here.' 'I have often wanted to speak to you, but with such a small party it 's hard to get people alone. But I want you to know,' he leant down, his hand on the rigging, and looked into my face, 'that my offer still holds good.—No, wait a moment.' I waited because I was really frozen into inability to move. 'That was all I wanted to put in that beastly letter, which I saw you were offended at. It 's better for you to know —and sometimes girls don't quite know their own minds at first.'

'Please don't say anything more,' I began. 'I would rather not listen to any more. I *quite* know my own mind —no change is possible.'

'Well,' he said good-humouredly, 'you stick to that idea, and I 'll stick to

mine. But remember you've only got to chuck your handkerchief in my direction at any moment, and I shall be down on my knees picking it up.'

I could not answer. As Janetta might have defined it, *he* was also in another language, and I knew no translation that could sound suitable and comprehensible.

There were literally no words in my vocabulary.

And I could not laugh as I should like to have done, because in his face was undoubted earnestness. He meant it all—he felt it—and I am sure he thought he had expressed himself rather gracefully.

15th August.

Life has developed, since I last wrote, on such new and startling lines; the outlook is so different, mentally and physically, that the position of every one has shifted, including my own, though indeed, with regard to myself, there seems not enough left to swear by.

But the great central fact remains unalterable, that I and John Elton, and a placid sailor are on an island in the middle of the Pacific, desert as far as we know, except for turtles and unknown birds.

I don't think it can be I, the Louise Mauvesyn whom I have known for twenty-eight years; so I am sitting down with this desk, that has outlived many vicissitudes, with the intention of verifying how much of me remains.

First to recall exactly what happened.

It was that same night on which I had listened to John Elton's words, and in the silence that followed them, I had

said 'Good-night,' without a comment, and had gone downstairs and to bed.

I would not let them haunt me, I shut the ears of my soul and went to sleep. But I noticed indolently, for my reflecting powers were elsewhere, that there was a mist thickening into fog, and that already it had obliterated the stars.

Directly there was that crash, which flung me out of my berth, I knew what had happened. And almost before I was conscious I was scrambling into my clothes, and rushing up on deck.

The fog had thickened considerably—one could not see a yard from the edge—the engines had stopped, the water was lapping against the sides in a manner which was alarmingly audible in the stillness.

'Look here! Don't be frightened,' some one said. 'We've been run into by a steamer; she's standing by, and we are lowering the boats. Get together any things you want, put on wraps—it may take time to get on board of her—and come up again on deck——'

That was John Elton, of course.

Even at that moment I thought the 'Don't be frightened' rather humorous.

'She's settling down,' Cyril observed. 'No hope of saving her. Fill your pockets with Brand's Essence, Louise; there's lots of it lying about.'

Janetta in a fur cloak, her hair twisted up under a red Tam-o'-Shanter, was just as guiding a figure, and far more sensible, than when she was forcing us all to play Corinne. Even at that critical moment, I saw Jock spare her a look of enthusiastic admiration, as he told her where to go, and what to do.

'Don't, please, only take Brand. It makes me seasick. Do, Miss Mauvesyn, for *my* sake, look for tea and potted milk. And, above all, a tin of meat—anything. I *can't* live on Brand.' Of course that was Don Vassal. The soft fog was filtering down between us—I could scarcely see him, where he stood at the top of the companion, up which poor little Lady Henry was staggering. Of all of us, I felt most sorry for her. Such a very unsuitable little person for Fate to single out, but after all Fate

had already singled her out, unsuitable as she was, for her attentions, and now she was at her again!

I don't know what I expected as she came up, blinking and winking in the light of Don's lantern, but not what I heard. 'Oh, Don, where are you?—I am so cold, and so sleepy.' Here a tremendous yawn followed.

'Never mind, Lady Henry. You stick to me, and you'll be all right. *I* was never born to be drowned; any one who knows me will tell you that!'

The boats were now in the water, a couple of them on one side, and on the other one ready to be let down. And by this one I saw appear and re-appear the tall figure of John Elton, as he placed in it, in silence, undiverted from the subject by any one around, the various contents of saloons and cabins that seemed suitable for her needs. 'Don't lose your head,' he jerked at me once as he passed; 'take brandy and matches. She won't live long, I am sure, and *anything* may happen—I don't see a sign of the steamer. Think if there

is anything you want to save. Have you anything on board you care for? Lots of time to get it, if there is. I can't go for you, because I am wanted to help lower this boat.'

Yes—yes, of course there were things I cared for. I don't think till then I had realised the situation.

I rushed to the companion — the captain was standing above me on the bridge—Jock was already in one boat, shouting orders to his passengers.

Janetta, leaning over the *Miranda's* side, and in as careful a spirit as Mr. Elton's, was dropping down such of the necessaries and treasures that were lying piled around her, for which space could be found.

'Now, Lady Henry,' Jock called, and Don was helping her over the swaying side.

It interested me even then to notice her odd little practical, unemotional way of looking round for a cushion—just as if she had been in a Dover Express, or on the Thames. Don found one, and threw it down. I turned away, and

rushed towards the stairs. There *was* something—many things, I wanted.

My watch and the little trinkets I always wear. I caught them up and thrust them into a bag with the other trifles lying close at hand.

But besides there was something else I could not leave—that leather writing-case with those letters I had written, and forgotten, had determined to forget. The only link left with you! I could not leave them. They were in one of the fittings of the cabin. I opened it and found them.

Yes, there was the case, with its stores of paper and pens and pencils, that I had meant to beguile the voyage with, and which I had never touched.

'Louise,' some one shouted. I caught it up and ran, but passing the saloon door I remembered Mr. Elton's order, and plunged into its misty darkness. I knew where the brandy was, and the matches—the only things I could think of, a mere repetition in my brain of his words, and pushing them into my coat pockets started again, at the sound of

another impatient voice overhead.—John Elton's this time.

The bag was large and heavy, and impeded my movements, and the writing-case singularly inconvenient.

With the incongruity of thought and life, I could only remember, as I struggled up the narrow steps, a ridiculous American farce that I had seen years ago, in which the eloping heroine rushed back at the last moment for her mother's portrait, and returned with a large oil-painting, which she carried about for the rest of her nocturnal adventure, finding much difficulty in dealing with its size and conspicuousness, at all the impossible junctures of which a farce is capable.

With my hand tightening its clasp on those valueless letters, I felt myself quite as ridiculous and sentimental as that young woman.

John Elton was awaiting me at the top of the steps, quiet and unflustered. I put my hand in the one he held out, gladly—there was strength and comfort in his grasp. He was no longer the John Elton of old, but some one quite new,

and yet in some intuitive fashion to be trusted.

'Come,' he said, 'it's time to be off. The others have gone. We must pull away from the *Miranda*; she's sinking.'

Even then I did not feel uneasy. It seemed the customary thing—some one gives the orders, and one obeys them.

A minute later I was in the boat, John and a sailor pulling us away from the *Miranda*.

Captain Miles was still on her deck. He called out something, and we paused to listen—

'Pull out a good bit,' he said, 'and then shout. The steamer can't be far off. The other boat has got clear off —you'll likely catch her up——'

'Ay, ay, sir,' the sailor answered.

'Good-bye, Miss Louise,' Captain Miles's voice reached us again. 'Good luck!'

'And you, captain, are you leaving?'

'Yes, we shall all clear out now. There's no time to waste.'

Mr. Elton and the sailor pulled on, and the fog settled down deeper, thicker.

Occasionally we shouted, but no one answered, only our own voices came back, muffled and dull.

Hours passed—the whole of a long weary night—but at length the sun rose, dispersing the fog with a swift imperial action, that in a second banished doubt, and left the naked truth facing us.

Not a ripple on the water; the ocean stretched calm and placid to the horizon, and on it not the faintest semblance of a boat or a steamer, nothing to break the monotonous sweep but a shadow on the water, far, far away, which the sailor announced to be land, probably an island.

But my only hope was to catch a glimpse of the *Miranda*, a glad spectacle for which my strong eyesight sought in vain. Some one might be still there—it was better to think of than the appalling loneliness, though when I uttered my hope the sailor discouraged it.

'Oh no, Miss, it 's impossible. They 'll all have got away. She was settling down when we left. Likely they 've got to this island, unless they 've been already

picked up.' The words left me despairing. Chilly with the fog, though a blazing sun was remedying that evil, hungry and frightened — for what light in the prospect was there—it seemed to me I had never realised absolute despair till that moment.

I was ashamed of the feeling, for, after all, it wasn't pleasant for any one, but for a time it was overmastering.

'Look here, Miss Mauvesyn, don't you give up yet.' The voice was rough, but there was the sympathy of a fellow-being in it, and the tremendous loneliness was so appalling. 'What's the matter with you,' he went on, 'is fright and cold and hunger! You take a little brandy and some Brand, and you 'll feel quite different.'

I should like to have thrown myself down and cried; but fortunately one never follows those impulses, however much one may desire to. Instinct is too strong, or custom, or self-restraint. I lifted my head, and did as I was told, and smiled afterwards at the memory of poor Don's petition *not* to be fed on it.

Where were they? That was the thought that weighed most heavily.

'Picked up,' the sailor kept on asserting. His name was Samuel Brown; he was not talkative; he had a broad healthy face, and his views of every incident were quite unmoved by any remark or suggestion with which we answered them.

'That 's what steamers does.—Picks you up, and makes off, leavin' the rest——'

It was an ominous remark, and he uttered it in short sentences, in an impassive tone that suggested steamers were as unreasonable as comets or icebergs.

But if he were correct,—and there was something in his reiteration that was impressive—there seemed nothing more to hope for in earth or heaven.

Something of my despair must have appeared, for though John Elton had never seemed to me observant or tactful, his observation now was *à propos*.

'If they 've been picked up already, so much the better. They 'll be all the

quicker in coming to look for us. It's lucky we are near an island, for they'll more easily guess where to find us.'

How obvious! There was such real gratitude in my heart, I am sure it must have shown in my eyes.

'When we get to the shore we'll have out the tea-basket, and make tea,' he said next. 'But it will be a long pull. You lie down in the bottom of the boat —there's an umbrella, not much shade, but better than nothing.'

And the odd thing is that I went to sleep there!

. . . . .

All that happened a week ago, and now I am sitting under a palm-tree writing as composedly on this odious island as ever I did on the deck of the *Miranda*.

Until this moment I have had no opportunity, and not much time, but this evening I am alone in our kingdom, as John Elton and Sam are fishing, and when they had started the longing came over me to play at civilisation, and write a letter.—If not a letter, at least a re-

capitulation of all these circumstances, before I forget them.

If it were not for the amazing facility with which I forget,—and adaptability is forgetting the past in the present—I should have thought that would be impossible.

Why, why is not Janetta here, with her imperious will and delightful readiness?

I feel sure that if she had been, I should have been enjoying myself. She would have mesmerised me into a semblance of it, anyhow, and we should have been exploring every corner and hole together.—I dare not; I live in terror of snakes and scorpions, and monkeys, and all sorts of unknown animals.

I go to sleep in fear, and awake trembling—opening my eyes in terror at the thought of what hideous monster may be within a few yards of me.

Sam urges me to define the monster, and when I suggested a tiger he gave the first loud laugh that I had heard since we landed—though immediately all trace of it was banished, and his usual plain benevolent aspect returned immedi-

ately. 'Ho,' he said shortly, 'you needn't lie awake hexpecting tigers. There ain't,' he added impressively, 'on this 'ere hisland a beast larger than a spider, unless you count in them parrots.'

This was consoling, but I had always some anxiety lest Sam should not disdain a useful lie, so eager was he to be consolatory.

But as in an hour's walk I could myself see most of the land—even I could not imagine where a tiger could repose, or what he would eat. There was little enough for us.

If Sam was soothing, John was practical.

The first night he was so sorry for my terrors that he made me a bed in the boat. Now he has slung a hammock; and except that our choice of food (and our society) is limited, there's nothing much yet to complain of.

It is very little less monotonous than the *Miranda*, and there is the excitement of novelty.

Only—I should like to know which day to expect the steamer to call for us,

and that is, of course, exactly what we avoid talking of to each other!

A fortnight ago to-night—isn't it incredible?—I was walking up and down the deck with Don Vassal, discussing all the silly things people do discuss, as if they mattered, and some allusion was made to John Elton — something disparaging, I suppose, because I remember so clearly how Don paused and wagged his head in the funny little way he had, and said: 'If this yacht comes to grief, —in a good hour be it spoken—you take my advice, and stick to him, Miss Mauvesyn. You probably think you would be happier with me—but I am not so sure.

'You won't catch John Elton cast up on a desert island without a gun to mow down the cannibals, and an axe, and a box of matches, just like Swiss family Robinson.'

I laughed. 'And do you think he will do well when we *have* landed?' I questioned.

'Yes, my dear lady. A regular monkey after cocoanuts, and a perfect

Robinson Crusoe for practical purposes. I—you won't believe it—I should be merely ornamental.'

It would probably have been the case, —to-night I know I should not like the exchange to have been made.

Looking back over the past week, which seems as if a lifetime had been forced into it, there seems no moment when John Elton has not been the one ray of brightness in the gloom. I can't bear to think of what it would have been without him.

Quiet, good-tempered, full of resource, strong and practical; all that could be accomplished or invented is due to him.

'E 's a *man*,—that 's what *I* call 'im,' Sam informed me enthusiastically one day. 'On the *Miranda* I said that once, when I see'd him down below askin' the sensiblest questions, which, excuse me Miss, gents very seldoms hasks! They all laughed when I said that about 'im,' with a point of his grimy hand, 'but I was right. There 's no bit o' good ever arguying wi' me,—I says little, but *I am always right.*'

'Isn't it a mercy we have him with us?' I asked Mr. Elton later.

'Why?' he asked. And when I repeated, 'That he was always right, and how useful that would be in a country where there were only three inhabitants,' he stared at me in astonishment, and then said: 'Right or wrong, he is sensible,—and sober,—and accustomed to doing what he 's told,—those are far more useful qualities. Don't you think so?'

I saw that he was afraid I might be disappointed.

Sometimes a sort of terrified amazement takes possession of me, when I try to throw back my own image into John Elton's mind, and then look at it there with his eyes.

But in this loneliness, madness would lie that way! It is better to keep looking at him with mine.

It is odd how much food and drink does for one. I have never felt quite so despairing a fear of life since that cup of tea the tea-basket produced, the first day after we landed.

I lay on the sand, tears only held back

by shame, without a care or thought for anything beyond the miserable present. It was the result, I think, of landing and finding no Janetta awaiting me on the beach, as I had taught myself to believe would be the case. It was with an effort I lifted my head at the sound of John Elton's voice.

The 'Look here, Miss Mauvesyn,' didn't irritate me. I remember drearily being glad of its familiarity, and he held out a cup of tea.

'Blessed be the inventor of tea-baskets,' I said as I put it down.

'There was a nip of brandy in it,' the maker observed. 'Perhaps you'll sleep a bit, while it's hot, and when you wake we'll have rigged up a shade for you, and found a comfortable place. I am going to take a sleep also, because there's a lot to be done before night.'

I suppose I slept again. What was the use of keeping awake?

I remember thinking that as I shut my eyes, and when I reopened them the sun was sinking; my head was rested and clear, my tears dried, and I felt a

returning capacity for accepting whatever was necessary—that capacity which is part of one's heritage.

As I looked up and yawned, 'It's all right'—with this comforting formula Mr. Elton flavoured many of his speeches—'there's water on the island. Sam says it has been inhabited, he has found gourds and other rubbish; probably the inhabitants have gone off to another island.'

'On a visit!' I exclaimed. 'Oh, I trust not,—or if they have, that they will be eaten there, and never come back.'

'They may have been whites—shipwrecked, you know.' He was evidently startled—'Whoever they were, they might be able to help us.'

But I shook my head. I devoutly hoped they would remain wherever they were. Only a tiger was more alarming to my imagination than a prowling savage.

A great deal had been accomplished while I slept—and as I listened to Mr. Elton, I endorsed Don Vassal's bygone words.

It seemed, even to me, nothing more could have been thought of and accomplished, especially considering the short time we had had for preparation.

'When the moon is up, we are going back in the direction of the *Miranda*. She may not have sunk yet, and anyway we must make sure there are none of the others about.'

I scarcely thought of the words till the trail of silver rose across the sea, and I saw Sam beginning to cast loose the boat, and then a fresh access of terror beset me.

To be left alone in this awful solitude, with goodness only knew what dangers at hand, dangers which I could not even define to myself, though that did not modify them.

But there was nothing I could urge when it was impressed on me how important it was not to lose a chance.

'You must not be frightened. There 's nothing to be frightened of. And if you are nervous, stay in the cave. There 's shallow water all round it, and you could see if anything came in.'

'And perhaps we will find the *Miranda* and bring more tea—and cushions,' Sam suggested persuasively, 'and milk, lots of tinned milk.' And with this splendid bribe, which I knew neither of them believed in, I had to let them go.

But I hate even now to think of those lonely hours. The cave had seemed best, lined with sand, hard and dry, and with ledges up which I felt I could jump and climb, if unknown beasts approached. Thus the night passed, and, after all, one is never quite as frightened as one expects to be.

But with the first approach of dawn I was on the shore, watching for the returning boat, though it was hours later before it reappeared.

I knew by then the worst terror that had haunted me, and that was that something might happen, and that it might *never* return. I shall always now understand exactly how the last man will feel, the joy with which he would greet the return of the most irritating of wives, or most reprehensible of mothers-in-law! And Diogenes, I know, was only happy

in his cask, or whatever he lived in, because he could get out of it whenever he felt inclined.

But at length the boat approached the shore, John's cheery shouts preceding it.

'Hope you haven't been dull!' Those were the words that reached me. Could any one else have made such an inconsequential remark? But I really didn't care what he said, I was so thankful to see him.

'No visitors, I suppose?' At this sort of remark Sam always giggled approvingly. An hour later I was at peace again, partly I suppose the result of a good meal, and the reprieve from anxiety —and there is something exhilarating, under any circumstances, in good health and good temper.

Mr. Elton sat down with a pipe after the meal, and told me of his day's doings, just as calmly as if he had returned from the city or a football match, and was ready after a good day's work to fulfil the pleasant duty of talking it over, for the benefit of those who had not shared his luck.

Sam cleared away the repast, for which I was duly grateful, and then seated himself at the distance, which I suppose represented the forecastle, and proceeded also to light his pipe.

And all the time John talked of his plans and schemes I kept on recalling Don's words.

No sign of the *Miranda.* She had evidently sunk, or drifted away, and not a sign, which was more disappointing, of any one, or anything else.

Don was right. If such misfortunes had to be, here was the right man in the right place! I am sure Don and I would have been still sitting on the sand, wondering how to set about housekeeping under such primitive conditions.

Sam would have been telling us what to do, and for that, he would first have had to try and remember himself what Captain Miles would have ordered.

During this whole week things have been settling down into steady comfort; everything the island can produce, which isn't much, has been found and considered.

There are plenty of birds and turtles, and fish, of course, and in time we shall be cleverer at catching them.

They are making me a cabin, that gives work for the cool hours—'Good for Sam; idleness is bad for every one.' So Sam works, though not as heartily and joyfully as John Elton.

And then in the starlight or moonlight we stroll about the shore and talk over all the possibilities—and how long it *may* take a steamer to get to land, and return to fetch us.

He is always very hopeful, and his common-sense unemotional views are consoling, and send me to a quieter sleep than my own thoughts might encourage.

He invents food for me, and cooks it, making the tinned meats far more palatable than I could ever have done.

To me he seems a miracle of forethought and assiduity, and I am constantly wondering how I can do, and know, so little.

To-night as I walked down to the boat with him, I said something of the kind.

'I am no use, I know, but I am everlastingly grateful.'

For a moment I saw he honestly didn't understand what I meant—and then—

'I say, Miss Mauvesyn, you don't expect a man to be as helpless as a girl, do you?'

'But I am not a girl,' I insisted, 'I am a woman and——'

'You 're the rippingest girl *I* ever met,' he retorted stoutly, 'and you know that.'

It was the first personal note that had been struck, and it sent a vague shiver of nervousness all through me.

Did he guess it, I wonder, or did I in some way show it? Anyhow he answered it.

'Look here, Miss Mauvesyn,' and he stopped short and waved his pipe in the air, 'I have got a jolly lot of sisters of my own; I am the only brother, you know, since poor David died, and I 've got the best mother in the world, and, please God, it won't be very long before I see her again, and, till then, you just look on me as a brother, and I 'll add you into the home lot—and there we are——' he ended, with one of those silly slangy

sentences which used to irritate me so fiercely.

It did not now. There were tears very near my eyes, and when I looked up I had to wink and blink to keep them back. John's honest gaze was fixed on mine—I stretched out my hands and clasped his. 'Thank you.' It was scarcely a suitable answer, but one had to say something. 'Thank you —John——'

'It's ridiculous,' and I laughed, 'to call you Mr. Elton, with no one but Sam to criticise my behaviour.'

'Right you are, Louise. I *never* met a girl who was always so up-to-date. It's rotten to go shouting through a desert island, "Good morning, Miss Mauvesyn." Here I am, Sam, let us be off.'

And that is how I come to be sitting under this palm-tree, writing an account of my own adventures.

When I get back to England I shall enjoy reading them, but in the meantime what a terrible, terrible blank in one's life it all means.

15th October.

I know the date, because we have made an almanac, and we tear off a day every evening, otherwise there 's nothing whatever to mark the flight of time.

Sometimes I wake, and a cold fear seizes me of what will come—of how long things *can* go on as they are, and of what the end of it all is to be; at those moments the sound of the rippling wave curling over on the sand maddens me with terror, and I start up, glad to look towards the smouldering fire, which is always alight within reach of John's care.

But those panics recur less and less frequently; I am drifting into a routine which seems satisfied with itself.

It really is a very nice life—I never did care for excitement and commotion, or fogs and snow. There is always plenty to do—I am of course very strong and well, and by the time I have done what is possible to help on the daily life, it is midday and siesta time. And

when I awake—and it is growing cool, we, John and I, wander about, and talk over all that is possible in the way of preparing for the future. He is frugally minded, haunted with a fear that our food may give out—there's not much left now of civilised comforts or luxuries. We have hidden a little tea and brandy in case of sickness, and he only has a pipe on great occasions.

I should not manage like that, I tell him. 'Let us eat up everything while we are strong and healthy, and able to enjoy it—and then thin down later on,' but the idea does not please him, and all the arrangements on this island depend on his 'Yea and Nay.' Without any over-estimation of my own qualities, I am sure I am quite as obedient as Sam. But if in return for obedience one gets good government, it seems a fair exchange.

To me there is unlimited terror in the very idea of a world where I might have to decide what was to be done.—Better *any* rule than none. How can Janetta and I be children of the same house!

And John is an easy king to live under. Even Sam finds no fault, in fact I see his admiration growing.

Occasionally his boasted silence gives way to a few words of appreciation. 'Ho, Miss, that *was* an idea,' when something especially luminous had solved some difficulty.—'E ought to live on a Desert Island, 'e ought.'

'Well, Sam, I hope we shan't be expected to stay with him, for I would rather go where one could *buy* a frying-pan, than have to make one, even as clever as that.'

'Shops is cheerful,' Sam assented rather dubiously, though he added immediately, with that inborn instinct to be kind, which dominates him, 'and ladies misses 'em—especially of a Saturday night.'

'Don't *you*, Sam?'—I sat down beside him where he was cooking, and consequently rather extra red in the face. 'Don't you long for muffins, and fried bacon—and your wife—and a hansom——?'

I paused breathlessly—partly because of Sam's worried stare of surprise. Ex-

cept my noble brother-in-law, the Earl of Ravelston, I never met any one who had such difficulty in grasping what I mean, as Sam Brown.

'I ain't got a wife,' he remarked, pushing the amateur frying-pan into a hotter place, 'and 'ansoms is dangerous and contrairy; my brother's wife was killed jumpin' out o' one as was runnin' away —but muffins!—yes, Miss, you 'ave me there.'

Sam, you see, has his weak spot. I was sorry I had alluded to it, because he looked very scornfully afterwards at the bit of turtle he was frying,—and he was pitifully hot.

Still there were moments when I had to risk rousing painful memories, because there was so little else of mental interest.

You see we have no papers, or books, or anything but each other's minds to burrow into. You can't guess, till you try, how limiting it is.

I used rather to flatter myself in old days that I was able to do on very little outside help, but it is impossible to realise

how much outside help there is in the most quiet of lives.

I had grown to look forward to the evenings, and the long talks, and the explorations into John's unknown life, that home life of which I knew nothing, and for my ignorance I was thankful. Everything he told me was another page turned in the only novel I had at hand.

He never questioned *me*, the need did not seem to possess him; his time and thoughts, I am sure, were filled with the practical difficulties of the situation, and the hard work that they entailed.

He was glad after dark to lie on the sand with the fire flickering within reach, and listen to me singing.

How thankful I was for my voice—and for all those years of training. I used to be capricious about singing,—how and where, and to whom,—but that had all passed, or vanished with the old life,—now I was only glad to be able to pay my share, any part of the share that I felt I owed.

And when I looked down into John's small dark eyes twinkling in the star-

light, with the gratitude that he would roughly try to express, or to Sam's round, contented countenance, into which some expression came at the first note, I knew I was repaying in the only way I could.

They both liked a 'tune,'—again a reminder of poor old Geoffrey,—but without an accompaniment, it was the simpler things I stuck to. Old Scotch ballads and Irish, anything they knew, they were pleased with, and fortunately they never wearied of their favourites.

I would ask them on occasions to choose something for themselves, and I would oblige if I could.

John was unmoved by my amiability. He knew no songs, except a few from the music halls, and only by name.—'I don't care what it is,' he answered—'I don't know the name of any bloomin' song in the whole world—it's listening to *you* I like.' And he looked up with the honest, tender gratitude of a big dog at me where I stood leaning against a palm-tree,—and at the words, the look, I felt myself reddening.

'And excusin' me, Miss,' came in

Sam's unemotional voice, 'as you asks, I make so bold as to choose the "Swannee River."'

The request came most opportunely.—I did know it, could even remember its stupid, pathetic words, and I began it at once.

'There's music for you,' Sam informed us, when I sat down. 'That's what *I* call a song.'

Remembering there's no use arguing with him, as he has taken many opportunities to inform me, I refrained from asking wherein its super, and especial charm lay.—I laughed, but it was a barren laugh,—I *knew* as I sang the words to the familiar air.

It was all that they represented,—that far-off, full, vanished life which they recalled, and then looking down, it was to see some shadow of my own grief in John's eyes,—some vast pity for my loneliness—not for his own.

He sat up, and stretching out his hand, drew me down beside him, with the kindly sympathy that a brother might have shown. I was glad of the

touch, glad of the look. I felt as if I should have liked to creep close to him, and gain some physical sense of nearness, that might help to overcome the loneliness.

He kept my hand in his, as if aware of the feeling, and I was grateful.

Is it, I wonder, possible, that if we could always banish the superficial and get to the spiritual, we should reach the lovable? is it that which we understand that we love?

What was it in the old days that used to irritate me?—I could not remember! His tiresome little tricks did not even jar, they had become part of a familiar personality, the interpretation whereof was *kindness*. And when you can only have *one* thing, there's really nothing better.

I suppose there are Positive people—and Comparative people. Those I mean, who, offered all that the world can give, would turn unmoved away, saying that as a crown was not amongst the offerings, there was nothing else desired;—and there are others—like me—to whom

it would never occur to make an independent choice, but who would at once begin selecting amongst what was there to choose from.

It is the adaptive, as opposed to the creative disposition.

That evening I began, I suppose, to recognise for the first time how shadowed my life had become by John Elton's influence. When I realised it I was happier than I had been for a long time.

It brought with it a sensation of rest, as if after a long, long uphill walk, one should find the ease of the slope downwards.

With the 'Swannee River' the concert came to an abrupt conclusion; afterwards John got up and sauntered away. I saw him go with regret, so fearful was I always now lest anything I might say or do should set a barrier between us. I did not want barriers, I wanted comfort and love.

I knew that quite well, and I knew also that I could have it, as much as I wished, at a price.

Through the darkness these thoughts

kept stabbing me, and I felt ready to pay any price, if only I could banish that abiding sense of loneliness. Other women I knew might have felt differently, even at such a moment would have balanced the price and the purchase, but I could think of nothing but the love, and demonstration of it for which my whole heart was yearning; it required an effort not to get up and follow him, and ask why he had left me, guessing so well what the answer would be.

'Sam, are you Irish?' If I had suddenly asked him if he were a Red Indian there could scarcely have been more amazement in the voice which replied, 'Irish! Lor' no, Miss, whatever made you ask such a question? You did make me jump.'

As nearly everything I ask him, he says, makes him jump—it 's a mere *façon de parler*, for he remains motionless, when not working, as the sphinx, or an embedded toad—I was not much surprised.

'Well, I am. I was thinking about it and wondering if you were. Don't

you think the least little bit of you might be?'

But Sam was adamant. Not the tiniest bit of him was anything but Bristol.

'Ho,' he finished scornfully, 'you don't catch me calling myself Irish at my time of life.'

I leant back against the palm-tree and laughed. This is the way Sam rewards me for singing his favourite songs. He is a constant source of refreshment when my spirits are jaded.

Also he invariably and most decidedly changes the current of my ideas.

'No, I don't want you to change, Sam'—this was the method of conversation that we usually carried on—'because then you would be some one quite different, and I should be sorry for that. I have got used to you, you see, as you are.'

Even in the moonlight I saw a satisfied smile pass over his wooden face, but he made no comment for a moment, and then 'It ain't lively for you, Miss,' was what he said.

'I am afraid liveliness is not what I shall remember this place by,' I assented; 'but it's rather nice, don't you think, in some ways?'

There was again a shadow of expression of some sort on Sam's face, and then 'Nice!' he suddenly repeated; 'I think it's the 'orriblest 'ole I ever was in.' Then he retreated into silence. So did I, feeling the vanity of argument.

Sam, of course, has less to interest him even than I. He has no pipe and no rum, or whisky, or whatever might comfort him in the way of drink.

Now with unlimited choice I should prefer water, and I don't smoke, also I expect my thoughts afford me more amusement than his do to him!

The only alleviation of his dulness is killing turtles, or rowing about in the boat. He and John often go out for exercise and exploration. I no longer fear being left alone on the island, and I always hope that they may sight a steamer or a yacht, or something.

But nothing ever comes, and I have left off looking eagerly seaward every

time I lift my eyes, as I used to do at first. I am narrowing my life into the possible routine.

John returned while we were talking.

I was aware of a flutter of self-consciousness and a slight tremor of anxiety when I saw him, but I was glad he had returned. I did not feel as if silence would answer the needs of the moment. I wanted to talk, though only God knows what I wished to say! I did not myself, but those to whom speech is easy are rarely at a loss for words or even subjects, and to those for whom the necessity is not an imperative one, nothing could explain the mere longing for expression, and the rest and content that is afforded by a sympathetic listener.

John Elton did not understand me, but he was sympathetic, and he loved me.

'What are you going to do?' I questioned, as he sauntered down towards the shore.

'I am going for a row.'

'Do take me.'

The words had been said; they arrested

him, and he paused, looking back doubtfully.

He had often taken me before, sometimes when he was fishing, sometimes just for the pleasure of an outing. I could row fairly well now, and with so little variation, I was glad of any change.

But it was late, and he had evidently meant to go alone, and *I* had proposed it, and I saw that he recognised the unusual in all these facts.

'I 'll row, if you take me. I don't feel inclined for sleep, and it 's a lovely night.'

'Come along then.'

It *was* a lovely night, one of those dream nights of the tropics—a silver trail of moonlight across the soft darkness of the waves, which rose and fell with the even gentleness of a sleeper's breath—the curl with which they broke on the sand was soft as a sigh, and the sound left an echo on the ear, like the murmur of a faint regret.

Overhead was the eternal rustle of the palms. There is something noble and lonely about a palm, even when, as in

our kingdom, they grow close together all along the edge of the sea; even seen thus, they are solitary, with a distinct individuality. I once saw a picture of one tall, slender palm in a wide desert, and crouching beneath it a lion, his eyes fixed on a dead man.

It was a haunting subject, and interpreted for ever to me the tremendous force of loneliness and strength.

The cool night air was reviving. I get so wearied by the want of exercise, and the monotony and the narrow confining space in which I live. It is not often I think of it—I don't encourage such thoughts; but to-night I was under the influence of strong dissatisfaction with everything, probably the reflex action of the 'Swannee River.'

'I shall never sing it again,' I said suddenly, and John started. 'If Sam prays for it ever so hard, I shall refuse, and shall give him Bach or Wagner instead.'

As John, I saw, had no idea to what I was alluding, and as it was not worth while explaining, I let that subject drop,

and started another, notwithstanding his 'Ehs?' and 'Whats?' which continued for some time.

My next topic was quite as unpremeditated as the last. 'Oh, John, when do you think they will come?'

It was the saying of the words which had been in my mind all the evening. I knew that directly they found expression. There were hours, days, when I never gave it a thought, but lived just in the minute—there were moments when the thought settled down like a shrouded terror, and this was one. It was almost with a sob I spoke. 'Sometimes I feel I cannot bear it.'

John Elton had shipped the oars, and we were rocking gently back and forth on those tiny waves; the moon was disappearing, the sky was one blaze of stars; but I was careless and heedless of everything but the despair in my heart, and the longing for comfort, however futile it might be.

'If it was not for you, I sometimes feel inclined to take Sam, and go away, and try to get into the course of steamers

—we can't be so very far out. But I don't like leaving you alone, *you* wouldn't like it, I am afraid.'

'Oh no, don't do that.' The tears were rushing down my cheeks, but I really did not care—what did anything matter? 'Oh no, whatever happens,' suddenly realising his words, 'don't leave me alone. You are the only comfort there is left me in the world.'

'It's beastly for you.' One might always feel sure that whatever emotion John wished to express, he would not hit off the classical synonym!

There was sympathy however, real, unmistakable, whole-hearted sympathy, in the tones,—the words seemed to matter very little.

'It's the loneliness, I suppose, and the dreadful separation from those I love, and the terrible, terrible fear that I never may see them again.'

It was out of the hidden depths I was drawing words now, and even in giving them utterance I was astonished at myself.

With all the enforced intimacy of

these months, it had still always been the superficial thoughts that I had sent adrift.

It was to ease my own burden I was speaking now, for I knew he would not understand *all* my cry.

But the actual, visible, undoubted griefs were, of course, there for him to sorrow for, and feeling as I did then, there was consolation in his sympathy even with the obvious and unavoidable.

'Look here, Louise.' It seemed to me the familiar opening had not been heard for some time, or perhaps I had only forgotten to notice it. 'Whatever you do, you mustn't fret.'

I saw him dive into a pocket, but we were rather short of handkerchiefs, and nothing but a knife came up in answer to the dive,—in the failure of this civilised instinct, he leant forward and brushed my tears away with his hand. It shone wet in the moonlight.

'You would need a mop,' I remarked drearily, 'for the spring is not dry yet. I could cry for hours!'

'Don't, please, don't,' he said plead-

ingly. 'It makes me wretched to see you—and you 've been so plucky! You mustn't chuck it yet. Hope, I mean,' looking vaguely round.

'I am not low-spirited by nature, but often and often if it hadn't been for you, I should,' he lowered his voice to a mournful whisper, 'I should *often* have been inclined to say "Damn this beastly island"——'

I saw that the swear word stuck in his throat—his lines were very distinct, and so easy to follow! 'You must not swear before ladies—all the rest of the English dictionary (and out of it) was at your discretion!'

'I echo your sentiment, John, only don't you think we should have been worse off without it?'

I was calmer, the fountain of my tears was drying up. Somehow, it was not easy to weep under the influence of John's touch, and the look in his eyes.

His hand, still damp with my tears, was now holding mine, and I let it rest in his firm clasp—there was comfort in the touch, and under its influence the

passionate emotion of the last hour was dying out.

'I don't see much pluckiness—but it's nice of you to say so. In every way,' I leant forward to give the words greater emphasis, 'you have been *very, very* nice.'

Such stupid words. He was nearer to me now, sitting in the bottom of the boat, and my two hands were held in his. We two, quite alone, under that wide starlit sky, on those still waters, which reflected the starlight in every tiny wavelet, and the boat gently moving up and down on its wide bosom.

I did not feel anxious, or nervous, or happy, or even unhappy—neither memory nor prophecy touched me—I felt as if mesmerised, as if we two had passed beyond the bounds of this well-known world, and had been drawn into another, where the laws were all different, but instinctively understood.

There was nothing within me that rebelled against my position, nothing which made it seem indecorous, or unsuitable. At that moment we con-

stituted the whole world, and under such circumstances no critical, or outside voice is possible.

'I 'd have been a brute to make love to you when you couldn't get out of the way,' he began suddenly, so suddenly that I started, 'and I swore you should go your own way, and I 'd shoot myself, before you should find yourself wishing that I had.'

Even then I smiled at the memory of the many vigorous speeches of the same class which had jarred before, but this did not—for the time, at any rate, we were both speaking the same language.

'But if you want me, you know I am yours—don't you? I don't believe I love you a bit more to-night, when you 're the only girl in the world,' and he laughed, 'than when there was all London to choose from.'

Modesty of speech had never been one of John Elton's virtues.

But what did it matter? And it was true; I knew it was true. I had been the only girl in his world for a long time.

'I won't bother you,' he went on, 'but just say something! One word will do, to show I 'm on the right tack.'

'Yes, I want you—I don't know whether I care, or how much I care, or if it 's only loneliness.'

'Well, that 's good enough for me. All the reasons in the world don't interest me—I want you, and if you 'll come, that 's all that matters.'

He began lifting himself out of the bottom of the boat, but half way paused, still holding my hands, and after a look into my eyes, bent his head and kissed them.

'We 'll talk it over to-morrow,' he said, taking up the oars again. 'Lots of time,' with a laugh that sounded shy. 'It 'll give us a subject for our walk to-morrow.'

We did not either of us speak again till the boat grounded on the beach; silence everywhere, except for Sam's snores, which were faintly audible from the shelter which he had made for himself.

'Good-night.'

I had turned away, but at the word I

looked back to where John Elton was still standing by the boat, his tall, ungainly figure clearly defined in the starlight, his shadow wavering and uncertain, stretching from the sand at his feet to where I had paused, but his looks were not with the boat, but were following me with the silent faithfulness of a dog's.

Under the influence of that look I retraced my steps, and standing beside him, lifted my face to his. He did not speak, but his hands trembled as he framed my cheeks in them; then he kissed me once, very gently and tenderly.

Afterwards I turned and hurried up to my little cabin, and flinging myself down, cried as passionately as I had done earlier that evening, haunted by the memory of John's words:—

'The *reasons* don't matter in the least —as long as you want me——'

But deep, deep down, buried far out of sight, there was a part of me,—my soul I suppose,—which faintly urged that *I* knew that it was the reasons that *did* matter.

SS. 'ALBANIA.'

It seems as if there were always a moment when Fate relents; it occurs generally after she has very nearly shaken the life out of her victim! Seven hours after I had written my last letter, three hours after I had sobbed myself to sleep, I was awakened by excited voices and a rifle-shot, and when I looked out, it was to see a trail of smoke in the morning air, and a steamer bearing down towards us.

It was almost incredible to realise that we had been found, that the overwhelming despair of the previous night should know such a happy dawn.

I was *too* happy for any expression of it, but I am sure, to my last conscious hour, I shall be able to recall the emotion that possessed me, as I climbed up the side of the *Albania*, and looked my last on the fringe of palms, the hard line of sand, which I had paced so many hours, and the column of grey smoke, still rising from the fire, towards which I had thankfully looked, for so many nights.

It all typified a great slice of life, which nothing could give me back, and into which had been woven a terrible amount of myself.

The rebound was so overpowering, that for days I lived in a vague state of silent happiness, into which nothing definite found a way. All these strangers round me, asking questions which I mechanically answered, were unreal—a mere cloud between me and home—that word fluttering round, was all that I ever really heard.

The steamer was homeward bound—at Sydney I could telegraph, and hear at least some news. Never till those waiting days did I seem to realise how terribly likely I was to hear *sad* news, though I could not really fear it. It was I—I alone—who had run the risks, it was I who was about to be given back to those whom I loved.

It never occurred to me to write. I just sat day after day, wishing the ship could go faster, worried when any one spoke to me, even the sympathetic old captain, and maddened when the

interrupter of my thoughts was John Elton.

It is because of him that I have come down here this evening, locked my cabin, and opening my portfolio, have begun this letter. I must express myself somehow, must somehow come face to face with myself, and realise where I am, and to what I am returning.

It is from John I have taken refuge. All these many days he has never left me alone—following me, questioning me, congratulating me, annoying me in thousands of silly little ways, until I am ashamed to think how irritated I have been.

What trifles to be irritated over when the great joyous fact remains that he cannot interfere with. Why can I not bear it, I tried to say, knowing it is only a short interlude, and that then——

And then I looked up, and knew wherein the irritation lay; it was the sense of possessorship which showed in every look and movement.

When that realisation came to me, he was walking up and down the deck with

a showy young lady, who was hanging on his words. Something about me was said, I knew by her expression, and then 'Louise' came in John's strident voice, 'don't mope, come and take a run up and down with us before dinner.' I did not vouchsafe a reply, but there was a laugh from the girl, which was somewhat uneasily echoed by her companion, before they passed out of sight.

Sometimes I seek out Sam, and have a few words with him; he is generally the centre of an admiring crowd—he prefers that to the anxiety of one beauteous female sympathising with his misfortunes. John oscillates between the one and the other—his loud voice narrating his adventures can be heard at all hours of the day, and for as long as there is a light in the smoking-room. Adventures! what are there to relate?

Why, nothing ever happened. Looking back, I cannot think of one single thing that ever happened! What can they find to talk of?—I can think of nothing—can only find dull answers for the dull questions people insist on asking.

It is at home things have happened, or *may* have happened.

'What on earth do you tell them, Sam?' as a solemnly interested group moved to a respectful distance at my approach.

'Lor', Miss, it's striking how much did happen, if you come to think over it. But I am glad it's over,' he sighed ecstatically. 'Give me the rottenest old tub afloat, and you may keep all the Desert Islands that ever was.'

'Thank you, Sam, but I don't want them. I'd rather go to sea with you in that same rotten old tub.'

He stared in bewilderment, the old stare which three months' companionship had taught me was the tactful moment for changing the conversation.

'Sam, when we get back to England, I shall give you a beautiful pipe, and I shall keep you in tobacco till you die.'

'I smokes a lot, Miss,' was his unemotional and discouraging rejoinder, 'when I can get it.'

'I don't care how much you smoke—

you shall have it, and it shall be put in my will, in case I should die before you.'

'That 's not likely, Miss,' was the civil reply, 'and I trust you 'll keep both your health and your memory.'

It was a pleasure to see some one who had dropped into the new life, bringing *just himself* into it. I surely was not the same Louise Mauvesyn. I could not even put myself in the attitude which might enable me to see things as she saw them, and as to John Elton, the one I knew, or remembered, was surely buried on the Desert Island—this aggressive, irritating, loud-voiced man could not be he!

A sentence of Sam's came back to my memory, spoken in admiring tones, as he manipulated an amateur frying-pan under a blazing sun. ''E ought to live on a desert island, 'e ought.'

I smiled as I leaned over the steamer's side, watching the phosphorus crown the waves. 'Yes, indeed he ought.'

An arm insinuatingly encircling my waist brought me back to earth, or deck,

with such violence, that I very nearly jumped overboard.

At any rate, the jump was vigorous enough to set me free, and there was no doubt about my expression of unamiability, I am sure. My eyes were probably furious, my cheeks, I know, were scarlet, for Mr. Elton looked decidedly abashed, and there was an unaccustomed thrill of doubt in his 'I beg your pardon, Louise.' But I felt unapproachable—as if I could not bear even apologetic words. It was in silence I moved towards the companion.

'Louise.' He turned with me, hurrying as I hurried, 'I'm awfully sorry, I didn't mean to annoy you.'

I half paused. 'After all' some voice began, dimly trying to state the case as I did not wish to hear it stated.

'——But you've no cause to be jealous. I was only larking with that girl.'

It was useless answering or speaking. There was a despairing sensation that nothing I could say could he, by any chance, understand. I was almost un-

conscious of my silence, till I got down here, and had locked the door, leaving him, I have no doubt, reflecting on my baseless, but most feminine, jealousy, which had sprung into such vigorous being, as to be proof even against his caresses!

Something must be done—or said—which was so far more difficult.

For if there is any one to blame, it is I. He has not altered; I am sure he is just the same—it is I for whom the focus has changed.

I feel to-night exactly as I used to feel on the *Miranda*, only with a dull weight at my heart which was never there then, —and there is no cause for it, because when we left Sydney, it was to take away with me a telegram from my dear old father, banishing all fears—every one is alive and well and at home, except Jock Leslie, who is still hunting for me—they don't say where! There is nothing now, but John Elton, between me and peace and happiness.

It is impossible to know what to do. Of course I *could* say 'Good-bye,' when

we land—or I might even, to-morrow morning, refuse to speak to him again, but how can I——?

No albatross could be more haunting than John, with those three months' devotion and help to back him up; I feel that it will be impossible to explain, that he will never even grasp what I say, unless I put it all into words of one syllable—and I cannot—the fear of it keeps me silent, though every hour's silence makes the future worse.

Into my mind floats the memory of a young officer, a German, I once met, who told me he was learning Russian; and when I sympathised with the difficulties that must beset him, he replied cheerfully, 'Oh, one doesn't need to know many words to get on all right in any language—bread and wine and darling are about all that are necessary. I am sure they'd take me to St. Petersburg.'

That's just about the outfit John Elton would require!

. . . . .

The time has passed somehow; we are

within a week of home, they tell me; my heart aches so passionately for home and love and care, that the other worries have faded somewhat. For a time everything went better. John was huffy, and I was silent, and we drifted apart, or at least I pleased myself by hoping such was the case, and I pushed the end of it all out of sight, consoling myself with the thought of Janetta's strength and moral support, and of Cyril's love and good nature.

And home and protection, the longing was so overwhelming that I feared sometimes to sleep and die, and never know it again. *It*—all that it signified—would stand between me and these equally trying moments of John's familiarity, or his anger.

But for some time there had been a lull—he was deep in a violent flirtation with his fluffy-haired friend, and I hoped sometimes that he was really solacing himself, though my hopes were not very well founded, as I knew by little looks and words, which my ears and eyes too well understood.

He was angry, and he still hoped he

was making me jealous—and as the fluffy one was in earnest, the game was easy enough to play.

Why, oh why, did he not reciprocate? Everything would have been so easy, far too easy for Fate, who loves a complicated game.

Anyhow I had trusted that the game would continue till we landed; anything would be better than explanations, when there would be no way of escape afterwards, but it was not to be.

Beforehand I always say anything is better than a storm, but when one has been through it, and weathered it, however battered, and bruised, and half-dead one may be, one *has* bought something by braving the elements, and in this one that I have survived, I have bought freedom. Nothing, nothing that could ever be said or done now can take me back into slavery.

I am free, through the strength of passionate anger; it would, of course, have been better if reason and wisdom had gained it, but I am not made like that—it requires the heavens to fall, be-

fore I have the courage to seek out a new path, and escape by it.

It is quite cool now in the evening, so balls, concerts, and games of all sorts take place after dinner.

I join in nothing—I know it has made me many enemies, though I plead my loneliness and anxiety, and all I have gone through.

The Captain, who is fatherly and kind, sympathises, and some of the ladies, I think, understand; others are cross, because I refused their well-meant offers, and urged that my wardrobe was not equal to a ball.

Miss Cartwright, the fluffy-haired girl, was displeased because I refused to appear as a champagne bottle at a fancy ball; by the aid of a borrowed skirt and a great deal of silver paper and cork, she thought I could easily make up to that amount.

All my excuses, I saw, fell flat; she only decided that I was haughty and unfriendly.

Neither would I dance. Walking tonight down the deck just before dinner

—I had been taking a turn with the Captain, and he had been called away—as I passed the smoking-room door on the way to my cabin, two men standing in the shadow were exchanging confidence. 'She doesn't like his goings on,' one said. 'And I 'll back C. to win—she 's a pertinacious chit,—*I* know,' with a self-satisfied laugh. 'I believe that he 's given *her* the chuck, and that 's why she 's so offish.'

I *knew* they were talking of John and me, in the way one does know such things. In a sort of terror I slipped into the darkness, as swiftly and quietly as possible, and disappeared, for fear they should realise my presence, and again came over me the sensation that even for another week I could not bear it.

Directly I could, without attracting attention, I went away from dinner. John was very talkative, but his conversation was chiefly devoted to Miss Cartwright, the girl on his other side. They were discussing the possibilities of the evening amusements, and when they were especially animated, I escaped.

It was a relief to talk to Sam, radiant and smiling,—no undercurrents to dread with him.

'Only a week more,' I said. 'Doesn't it seem as if it would never pass?'

'Lor' no, Miss, it 'll pass sure enough. 'Olidays always does. It 's been 'evingly,' with a grateful glance at his pipe, 'but we 're getting back to work—that 's 'ow *I* look at it.'

It certainly wasn't the way I looked at it, but Sam never liked work. One is always learning how many points of view there are, and in the many, it seems quite odd how seldom one finds any one who sees it from one's own!

They were all up from dinner when I returned. John, I saw standing by the smoking-room door. I fancied 'on the watch,' but Miss Cartwright was still by his side, and still talking.

'Louise'—his voice reached me easily enough; it was a little raised, and rather imperious—'don't go off yet. I want to speak to you. Wait a moment, and I 'll come.'

The last words failed a little in the

decision of the first; this was due, I fancy, to my continuing my walk as if I had not heard. At the change I paused. 'Come then,' I said, 'and let us take a turn before I go.'

I did not glance round; I waited just where I was, looking over the steamer's side,—well aware of Miss Cartwright's urgent words.

Something different she evidently wanted! But whatever it was, it was postponed. John walked over to my side.

It was quite dark, for which I was glad; it was easier to be silent in darkness, and I was not quite sure what would be the best beginning. It was so difficult to speak, and not seem to endorse the idea that I had grievances, which I knew was seething in his mind.

But no time was given me for attack or defence, for, with the first step we took, my companion began, 'Well, I 've had enough of this. I hate quarrelling. Let 's make it up, and begin again. I 'm not too proud to own up,' and he stretched out his hand. I placed mine in it. It

would not do to be too exact — and require a confession of which particular sin he was repenting.

The situation was strained, and he had recognised the fact, that must suffice,— the less said the better, but the undotted 'I's' were not to escape.

My hand was in his, he drew me nearer. 'Well, give me a kiss now, and don't be jealous again. You know jolly well you have no cause.'

I started back as far as his tight grasp of my hand would allow.

'For Heaven's sake, don't say such things, I really cannot listen. Don't you understand——?'

I got so far, scarcely knowing how to end my sentence, but I was arrested by the expression in his face—an expression of mingled anger and amazement.

'Then what on earth are you angry about—for you *are* angry, any one can see that. Too angry, I suppose, to kiss and make up?'

'I am not angry,' I faltered. 'There is no possible reason why I should be——'



'Do you mean,' he was standing still, and he looked at me with a sort of furtive distrust, 'that you want to back out of our engagement?'

'Yes, John,' I began—and there I paused, though I was thankful that those words had somehow been said.

But I could not go on with them. It seemed too ungrateful, especially as he did not reply in the fervent and denunciatory tone that I expected.

He was silent for a second, and then, 'You 're awfully changeable, aren't you? I bet you 'll change round again before we land. I shall just hope so. I 'll cut the C. girl, and devote myself to you, and then I expect you 'll come round.'

Isn't it hopeless—and yet from his point of view, so natural. But though I was sorry for *him*, I was happier for myself. *Something* had been said; the cloud did not seem quite so black; some of the storm had been dispersed; it would always be easier, whatever might come in the future,—the first words had opened a path for the second.

With that consolation of the cowardly, I said 'Good-night.'

'And not a kiss,' he urged sentimentally.

'No, no'; the memory of that last night on the Island coming over me in a wave of horror. He remembered too, of course. Why not!

'You're a bit of a flirt too,—indeed, you run Miss C. rather close!—but I don't mind a flirt all open and above board. I *like* a woman to have a spice of the Black Cat about her. I only mean that if you pitch into me, I——'

He stopped abruptly; I suppose my looks did not seem propitiatory.

'Good-night,' I repeated—'I am tired; I am going to bed.'

In a silence, which I felt to be perplexity, he walked with me to the top of the cabin-stairs, but when I attempted to pass, he stopped me, holding my hands so tight that I could not escape without an effort.

'There's no use trying to get out of the bargain,' he said, with an uneasy laugh; 'you'll *have* to stick to me.'

Something in the tone jarred,—I felt my temper rising. 'All the same, I don't think I mean to——'

'Girls think this and that,' he said patronisingly, 'but they end up by doing what is best.'

'I really don't understand you'; I spoke coldly. 'It 's late,—you must tell me the rest another time.'

'No time like the present.' He leant down, lowering his voice to a hoarse whisper. 'You 'll find that after the last three months, the best thing, the only thing possible, for you to do, is to marry me—and I 'm jolly glad to have you.'

For a second I really scarcely understood, and then the temper kept at bay with some difficulty for so long was let loose.

I wrenched my hands free. 'If all the world decreed it would be best and wisest—if all the world decided that without the shelter of your name I was beyond the pale,—I would not marry you to win its approbation.'

I did not pause to see how he took the

words; indeed, I was in too great a whirl of passion to notice any details, or even to think, until I was safely down here, locked in my own cabin.

. . . . .

Of course it was the only thing that ought to have been left unsaid, so equally, of course, John Elton was destined to say it; but though I recognise the inevitability, all *his* avenues to my soul and heart are closed, never, never, I feel, to be reopened.

My hand is trembling, and my pulses throbbing as I write, and in my heart is the first faint shadow of another approaching trouble.—Is it possible that others will think the same? It will not alter my decision,—if the whole world united in persuasion, or contempt, or disapproval, I would not marry him now. In some things I am adamant, and this would be one,—but I cannot bear to think of those I love on the other side.

CROFT,
LEYBOURNE, *24th December.*

I am at home. It is Christmas Eve again,—a year to-day since I was writing my last letter here; it is impossible to believe that I am the same woman,—and yet the fact is always being borne home, that, let circumstances vary as they will, it is we who remain unchanged. I do, anyhow. With my return here, I feel that during the past year I may have been some one else, but that now, back amid the old surroundings, I am finding at once the woman I left behind.

First to call her back out of the shadows rose your memory, and all day I have been waiting for this quiet hour, when I should sit down, and write to you.

For a long, long time you have been outside my world, but to-day I have found you in it again.

Is it only because I am so afraid you will misjudge me? I suppose that is inevitable.

You will hear probably the world's talk, and when you do, I wonder if you will still be interested enough to care what has swayed me hither and thither. Perhaps you will even meet John Elton, and hear his story,—he seems to have told a good many people how badly I have treated him,—and some day, some far-off day, I want you to know what I have felt and thought,—sometimes I believe that you will understand, though even as I write the words, I sigh over the hopelessness of the expectation.

You, who would *not* have been swayed, will probably never be able to comprehend what devil wrought such havoc in me. Your devils, you see, are asleep; mine are playing cards with one eye always in my direction, ready to throw down their hands and rush towards me, should I only glance towards them.

No, I despair of your understanding; but at least you shall know, so I shall leave you these letters in my will. To *know* will be at least better than nothing. I shall sleep sounder in my grave for the knowledge that you possess them.

John was obtusely agreeable till we reached Southampton. He made no further reference to his past speeches and future hopes. I guessed he had determined to leave his diplomatic adjustments to more experienced hands; Janetta and Cyril were, I felt sure, the two intermediaries on whom his hopes were fixed.

Meanwhile I rejoiced in the silence, which was so much pleasanter than recriminations, and it was a relief to me on the last night to see him seated on the floor, one of a circle, playing Hunt the Slipper. I was always so much happier when I could imagine he was enjoying himself, and whatever he might say, I don't think that I stood in the way of 'ripping moments,' as he would have described them, with Miss Cartwright.

As he once genially remarked to me in the earlier days of the voyage, a little must be overlooked in his behaviour, as he was 'on the bust.'

. . . . .

'Miss Mauvesyn.' The very first voice

I heard was that of Don Vassal, even while I was clinging to Janetta.—I never knew I loved any one so much, or had ever known any one so beautiful.

'Miss Mauvesyn, spare a word, a tear, a smile for me—I have come such a long way for them.'

With very little encouragement I could have hugged him also, regardless of the crowds of passengers, and the Captain, and Sam; it was, I think, chiefly his cold, unemotional eye that restrained me.

'Oh, Don.' The tear was there ready enough. It dropped plump on the ground as I took his hand.

'Poor *dear*! Come along out of this crowd. Let's go and drop our tears together in a first-class carriage while Lord Ravelston looks for the luggage; as you know, I am not useful, only ornamental.'

My hand was tucked into his arm, though I was nearly a head taller than he, and he kept giving it little affectionate jogs and pats.

'No luggage,' he repeated, catching

the only words I could think of. 'Why, of course! It's the only advantage in a shipwreck I ever heard of!'

'Poor, *poor* dear! Has it been very awful? And was John a comfort? I am sure he was. You remember, don't you, how I prophesied that if he was ever destined to distinguish himself, it would be in that line?'

'And Sam, how are you, Sam? I'm very glad to welcome you back to England. I hope you made it agreeable for Miss Mauvesyn. Did you like your old Island?'

'It was a beastly 'ole,' was Sam's uncompromising reply. 'There weren't nothink on it fit for a Christian to look at, or eat, let alone drink. If it hadn't been for Mr. Elton I believe I'd have died of despondency.'

'Good old John! What a tribute!' Don murmured. Sam was going. There was a queer feeling of sorrow in my heart as I looked at him and realised it. In his stolid countenance there was little to encourage sentiment, but I knew some trifling things we had talked of in that

far-off past, which were hidden behind the stolidity, and I held out my hand in real sympathy and regret.

'I haven't forgotten the tobacco, Sam. I shall send you a lot when I get home, and I shall have it put in my will, as I promised. And some day you must come and see me—I shall always remember how useful and kind you were.'

'Ho, Miss, I shan't forget you either. You was a most peaceable lady.'

Like John, Sam seldom ever seems to hit on the right word for the expression of his sentiments. I ask you, what chance had I of being *un*peaceable?

It was evidently, however, meant to be high praise, and the squeeze he gave my hand nearly broke my finger-joints; but he uttered no further word, and this convinced me he was correct in his statement that he was not Irish—he was *all* Bristol.

'Oh, Don, I should like to fall down and kiss the muddy ground,' I exclaimed. 'I don't care how much it rains or snows, or blows east wind. I never want

a climate again—only weather—or to see a turtle, or a palm-tree—or John Elton.'

'How I sympathise! *All* things, of course, which one might be driven to require—but all things one would so much rather be able to do without.'

I know I reddened—and Don always saw everything.

What a mercy to be with some one who did not ask *why*!

'I worried about you a good deal,' he went on. 'You know *we* were picked up directly by a steamer—the one that had prodded us down. Well, I insisted you hadn't been picked up, and I begged the Captain to wait and look about a bit, and so he did. We twisted about all night, and when it was day, and there was no sign of you, and every one said you must have been picked up by some one else, I wasn't at all satisfied, and went on worrying a lot about you.

'And as to poor old Jock. He used to sit hours at a time with his head in his hands trying to think where you were. He was never much good at

talking, you remember, but he took it out in thinking.'

'And I trust Janetta worried also?—Did you?' as my sister appeared.

'She was so upset that I offered to get up a Corinne party the first night. I thought it might help us to think of something—it was a very stimulating game, you remember—but she refused. She didn't think it would be kind with you lost.

'Lady Henry slept for two whole days,' Don continued his recital of events, 'she couldn't get over being awake a whole night,—I don't think she even noticed she had been shipwrecked.'

We were getting into the train as he talked, I in my very worn blue serge and red Tam-o'-Shanter, the cynosure of all eyes, guards' and porters' and passengers' —John was also self-importantly aware of the excitement he was causing, and as to Sam, his face was redder than ever, I suppose from his determination not to talk.

I hung back a moment to question, 'And Lord Henry?'

'He 's beginning to come back,' Don returned rather glumly. 'It 's cheering her up a lot.'

This time it was I who gave his arm an affectionate little jog of sympathy.

'Perhaps he won't stay,' was the only sympathetic word I could think of.

'What 's the odds if she 's always wishing he would? I go to tea with her sometimes, but as you know, she doesn't care for my talk, however brilliant it may be.'

Janetta and I travelled up alone to town. I am sure that was Don's doing, and almost before he had disappeared with the reluctant figure of John Elton, I was pouring forth my story.

'Oh, Janetta, you *must* help me.' I never remember feeling such absolute dependence on her strength and determination,—such need for some one else's help—not for the practical part, but for the moral support—I had been so terribly lonely!

'Poor Louise,' Janetta said several times. She was, I knew, in one of her most melting moods, and after all, though

she is so vigorous and determined, she is very affectionate, and her odd habits are chiefly the result of misdirected well-meaning.

'How did you bear it? I remember what a Bounder he was, even in a limited circle, what must he have been in a *tête-a-tête*?'

'He was far better.' I strove to be loyal, and try to remember the good qualities for which I had openly and secretly so often returned thanks,—but my sister only stared in bewilderment, and I felt it hopeless to try to explain.

How could I explain what I could not understand myself?

'No, it's hopeless, Janetta, I know, but you must take my word for it, and help me now. I can't bear the idea of displeasing every one at this moment, but if he were the only man in the world, I *could* not marry him. He is so very insistent, and he is determined to succeed —that's why I tell you at once,—and, of course, he has had, as he says, a lot of encouragement!'

'My dear Louise, even he, I suppose,

doesn't consider that you are responsible for the encouragement forced upon you by Heaven?—*I* should say that your best answer to him is, that without a choice, you have had enough of his company, and do not care to take any more of your own will.'

'It *sounds* very well,' I admitted, 'but I don't want to discuss the subject with him.'

'I never minded discussing any subject with any one,' my sister replied, which is perfectly true. 'I'll talk to him first, and see what he has to say.'

I threw my arms round her neck, and kissed her warm, brown cheeks. I never remember feeling such a longing for demonstrative affection.

Janetta was touched. We are all so superficial, and so unused to our emotions, which possibly are there if we hunted for them, that they surprise us when they appear without a call.

If my heart were really awake, I am sure I should always be listening to it, to be sure that it had not ceased to beat.

Janetta's probably gave a jump then

that surprised her. The result was that she supported me in my determination not to stay a night in London, as every one wished me to do, especially John, who had decided on a great dinner at Prince's, in honour of our return.

But even Don Vassal, who had come from York to meet me, and had also planned a festival, did not press the point.

'I want to go home—it 's such a long time,' I pleaded. 'And besides, with no luggage, I am afraid Prince's would not smile upon my presence.'

'I am not so sure,' Don returned; 'you really *look the part.* I never saw any one appear more shipwrecked.'

'Never mind,' he added, 'I 'll get leave and come down again, though I assure you it won't be easy. When I said to my Colonel I wanted leave to go and meet a shipwrecked lady, who had been living on a Desert Island for three months, I saw that he didn't *quite believe me,* but then, of course, men do ask leave for such odd reasons, that, as he admitted apologetically, 'it made him sceptical.'

John was more persistent, but Janetta would listen to nothing—she did not even offer to take him to Ravelston, which I am sure he had expected. And for all these things on her part, I was very grateful.

When she and Geoffrey drove away, leaving me here, I felt there was nothing they could ever ask in vain of me, so beneficent was it to feel that sense of protection and intimacy which for so long had been absent from my life. And never can I doubt Geoffrey's kind, good, honest heart, since those stumbling words, which he said when he found himself alone with me.—'I have had a letter from poor old Jock. He was almost off his head with anxiety, but he's coming home now. He says it was lucky it was you and Elton, as you both have some sense, when it might so easily have been a couple of fools like Don Vassal and Lady Henry Lawrence. At first he was all the other way, wishing it was them—but then, of course, that was when he thought you were drowned.'

If a little impolite to them, it was

kind to me, so I felt very grateful, and told him to hand my gratitude on to Jock.

I kissed Janetta again as she was going, and promised gladly to go over and help her at the New Year. 'I 'll help you,' I promised, 'to find husbands for the Minxes—the "Steps" I mean—I am sure you ought not to despise any help in such a cause. You can have John Elton,' I added.

'I have thought of him,' my sister replied calmly, 'though I never could see that he had *anything* to recommend him.'

Of course he was *Cyril's* friend—and when Cyril arrived, which he did a couple of days later, I knew directly that he had been approached.

He had not the heart, however, to say much, especially in those first moments of reunion.

But I knew that however halting an ambassador he might prove now that he was under *my* influence, yet that when he had started, he had been red-hotly on the other side.

He faltered out something about the devotion and love which had been tried so severely, and had proved so strong, but by the time we had walked round the garden he was wavering, and in an hour we were talking of Lady Henry, and of the days when he was learning to make ties.

'It's no use, Cyril; I have had so much of his company that I could not stand another hour of it, at any price.'

And though Cyril feelingly urged that it was a good break in, and that probably I had got over the worst part, and that among a lot of other people I should not mind him so much, especially when thinking of what I *had* endured, I was not to be moved from the firm ground on which I was standing.

He desisted then. Unless he's in a whirlwind, when one must just wait, Cyril can generally be got round—so for the rest of the twenty-four hours he stayed, he left John Elton's hopes and fears alone.

Yesterday I had a note from Janetta,

sent over by a messenger, arranging for my New Year's visit. Mr. Elton is at Ravelston, she says. 'He gets on very well with Geoffrey. You remember he had an amazing fascination for Jock? I don't quite see what it is, but that's very unimportant. He told me all his grievances, he seems full of them; but when a man is cross it's better to let him talk. I think a wife and a yacht are what he wants. They would give him plenty to do, and prevent his thinking so much of himself.'

As usual, Janetta is admirable with her moral axioms.

'He says you are *very wobbly*, and that he still has hopes, as you have changed your mind so often, that you'll wobble back to him!'

'I said I thought it was kindest to try and disabuse his mind of this hope, or whatever it is. To me it seems merely a sort of *vulgar obstinacy*.'

From this ominous ending I guess Mr. Elton said something Janetta did not like. In which case I am quite sure she found some way of letting him feel

the weight of her displeasure, though, as I know, that is not easy.

. . . . .

The whole afternoon I sat writing this ccount of my return, and when I had nished it, I took all the letters and aled them in a parcel, with my great al—Louise—and then I wrote across 'After my death this is to be sent Theodore Bassett,' and the date Christmas Eve, 1899'—and when those eparations for the future were accomished I sat down in the winter twilight the hearthrug, and stared into the ood flames until my eyes were dazzled.

All the time I had been writing, all e time I had been making my preparaons for that vague future, when I ould not be here to defend myself, an sistent voice had been striving to make self heard, impalpable hands had striven th mine, but now that the work was ne, and I was idle in the firelight, ere was no drowning the voice, no tting aside the detaining touch.

Of a sudden into the present a door opened, and on the threshold, beckon-

ing to me, calling me by my name, stands the past.

A shrouded, silent figure, but if it moved, or looked at me, it is you I should see, your voice I should hear.—And I *must* listen, I cannot evade it,—the call is too clear, and too persistent.

Is it only the memory of last Christmas Eve, throwing its shadow over this, or the familiar surroundings, with their haunting reminders of you?—I do not know, I only know that I am restless and unhappy.

It was no use fretting, I went to the piano, but out of the dusky corners of the well-known, ill-lit room, crept ghosts of happy hours, and the tears were in my voice, and filled my eyes.

It was as bad as the 'Swannee River,' and in the loneliness and darkness I reddened at the memory of that evening.

I—I had kissed him, and been thankful for the knowledge of his love, had known a moment, nay, many of them, when *he* had been the only light in my little world—when I had been glad to think that I was the light of his!

And where had it all gone? Not a shadow remained that I could call up and endow with life. It was true then that what seemed so much can prove to be *nothing*? Loneliness and propinquity, was that all that was necessary to make me ready, and glad?'

The despair of the rush of thought, the memory, and all that it meant, took me away from the piano,—I could not sing feeling like that,—and as I did so, came clearly before me that other evening, so long hidden out of sight, when I had followed you after your 'Good-bye,' and with detaining hands had won from you that slight caress.

Again as I stood there, I felt your touch, and saw the gravity of your eyes touched with some tenderness for the despair in mine,—it brought almost a physical sense of strength and help,—the anguish of my heart was calmed; out of the silence a voice spoke, as it had spoken once before, 'Fear not, it is the things which are not seen that are eternal.'

. . . . .

I have unsealed the packet, and I am adding these last lines before I say good-night.

How could I think I could wait till I was dead? I have scarcely patience for the hours that must pass before I can get your address. I have heard you are back in England. It was, I think, when I heard that, that I knew I could not wait!

You may have forgotten, you may have quite ceased to care. My name may no longer mean anything in your life, but anyhow I wish you alone in the whole world to *know*, and behind all my fears is a shadowy certainty that you will understand. No one else *could*, I am sure, but even if you do not, I want you to know what has swayed and influenced me; and oh, above everything else, if it is only to hear you say that you *cannot* understand, or sympathise,—even if it is only to hear you say that you have forgotten—or that you cannot forgive, still come to me, for the sake of those old past days.

I have come as I used to do in those

old days to your judgment bar, and with me I bring these letters to say for me what I cannot say for myself. Theo dear, let them plead with your heart, even if your head refuses their claim,—the only possible excuse for sending them is that you should love the reason for which they were written.

LOUISE MAUVESYN.

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